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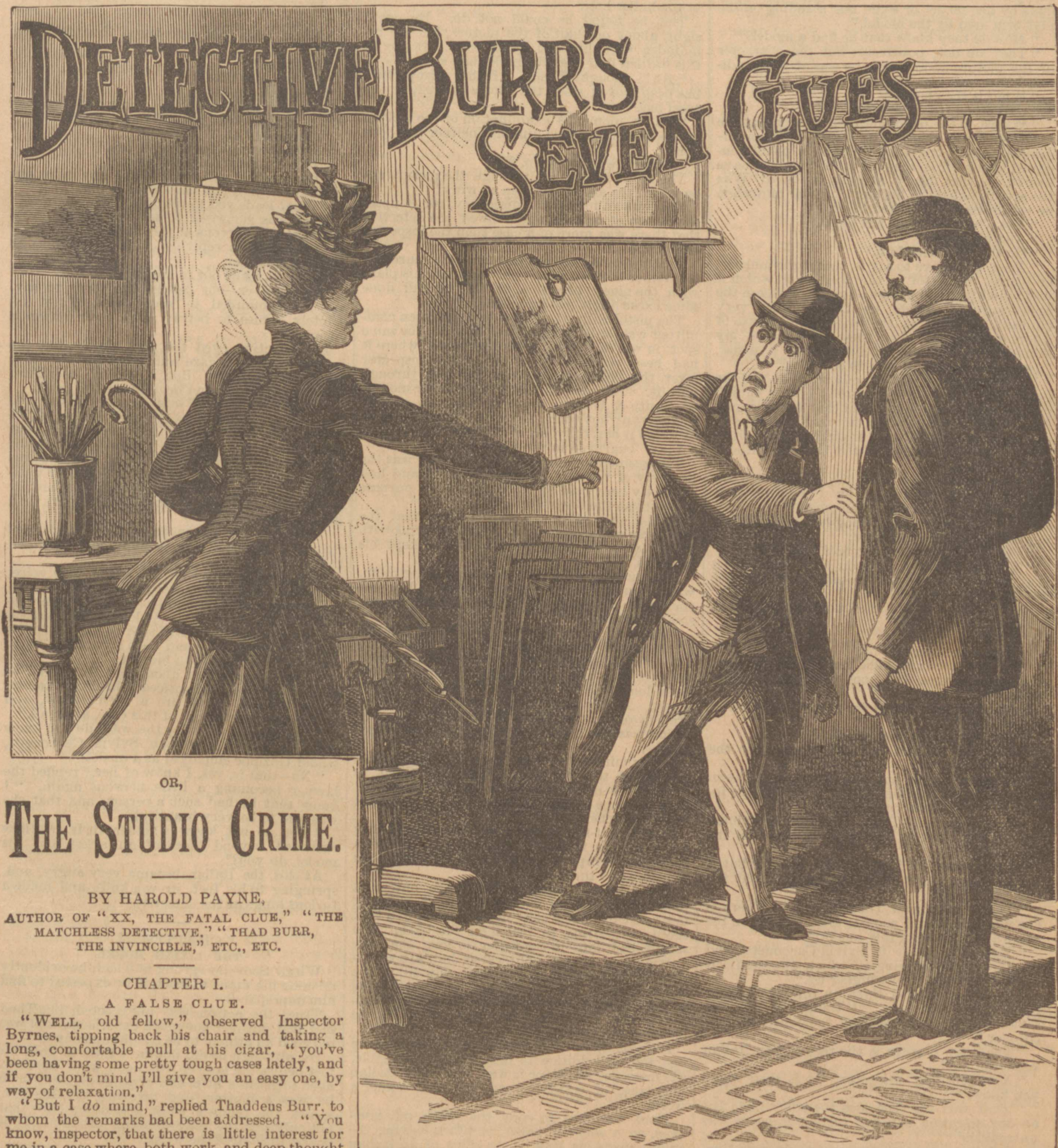
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OR,

THE STUDIO CRIME.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF "XX, THE FATAL CLUE," "THE
MATCHLESS DETECTIVE," "THAD BURR,
THE INVINCIBLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FALSE CLUE.

"WELL, old fellow," observed Inspector Byrnes, tipping back his chair and taking a long, comfortable pull at his cigar, "you've been having some pretty tough cases lately, and if you don't mind I'll give you an easy one, by way of relaxation."

"But I do mind," replied Thaddens Burr, to whom the remarks had been addressed. "You know, inspector, that there is little interest for me in a case where both work and deep thought are not involved. And as for recreation, this is recreation to me."

"YOU LIE, YOU MISSHAPEN BEAST!"—THAD BURR HAD NO DIFFICULTY IN RECOGNIZING HER AS THE LIVING MODEL.

The inspector's face assumed an expression of annoyance, the habitual smile faded and he smoked away in almost moody silence for five minutes.

At the end of that time his brow cleared, and he said:

"So you won't take the case, eh, Thad?"

Thad smiled in his turn.

"I did not say that, inspector. I merely said there was not the same interest—I may say, there is little or no interest, for me in a case which a novice could work out. However, if there is little in this case it will be the sooner done with, and I will be ready for something else. What is the affair?"

"An alleged murder that looks to me as much like a suicide, and in my opinion will turn out to be such. Still, the police think there is room for doubts and they are unable to determine what it is."

"What are the particulars, so far as known?"

"An Italian artist by the name of Vincenzo Gazippe, who had a studio in Twenty-third street, was discovered with a bullet-hole through his head, and a pistol with one empty chamber lying near him. From the position of the body when found, it is more than likely that the artist was sitting before his easel at work at the time he was shot, or up to the time he decided to shoot himself; and from the range of the ball, the police think that the shooting was either done by his model or some one standing on the platform used by the model."

"How do they know that he had a model?"

"They do not, positively; but the character of the picture upon which he was at work indicated that such was the case."

"What is the picture?"

"Calypto, a Greek goddess."

"Where do the police get their theory that the model shot him, then? The model, being an undraped woman, could hardly have a pistol concealed about her so that the artist could not have seen it. So, that theory, at least, is absurd. Was the artist's palette in his hand, or near him when he was discovered?" asked Thad.

"Yes, clutched in his left hand."

"And his brush?"

"On the floor near him."

"Then, all I have to say is, that if the murderer placed the pistol in the position in which it was found for the purpose of giving the case the appearance of suicide, he did his work very clumsily, in allowing the brush and palette of colors to remain. And their presence, in my mind," continued the detective, after a pause, "upsets the theory of suicide entirely."

"I cannot agree with you there," rejoined the inspector. "A man is generally moved to suicide by a sudden impulse, and that impulse may have seized this man while he was at work, and dropping his brush and snatching the pistol from a pocket, he committed the act without premeditation."

"Your theory may prove the correct one, inspector," remarked Thad, "but I don't favor it now. Have they arrested the model?"

"Yes; and after examining her, released her again," replied the inspector.

"For want of evidence to hold her, eh?"

"Yes; as you say, as soon as it was shown that the woman was not dressed, the idea of her having a pistol was absurd."

"Of course; but did she know nothing about the murder or suicide?"

"So she claimed."

"Wasn't she present?"

"No; it appears that she had left the platform a moment before and gone into her dressing-room."

"She must have heard the report of the pistol in that case."

"Yes, she admits that she did."

"And did she not run out to ascertain the cause?"

"It appears not; but you will have to learn the particulars yourself, Thad," returned the inspector. "I do not know them."

"Very well," said Thad. "And in my opinion there is more in this case than appears on the surface."

"There may be," replied the chief, "but I can trust you to get at the bottom of it, old fellow."

"Thank you," said Thad, rising. "There is one more question I want to ask: Have you the name and address of this model?"

"Yes. Her name is Sylvia Carbonetti, and she lives in the building in which the studio is located, but two stories higher up."

"Good!" exclaimed Burr, an intelligent light illuminating his face. "I think I already see something that has escaped the police and the coroner."

"That the murder is the result of an Italian vendetta, eh?"

"Yes; just that, inspector. It is their style, you know."

"That was the first idea the police had; but an investigation satisfied them the theory was untenable."

"I do not put much store in police investigations. In nine cases out of ten they only result in confusing matters. I will see what there is in it."

"All right, Burr; do the best you can with it. Here are the keys to the studio."

Half an hour afterward the Invincible Detective turned the key in the lock of the studio door.

The place had been shut up ever since the removal of the body, and nothing had been changed in the studio.

Upon the easel stood the half-finished painting of the siren Calypto. Near the easel was the artist's stool, and about a yard in the rear of the stool, where the artist had evidently lain after falling from the stool, was a large stain of blood.

After looking about the easel for awhile, Thad took a position on the platform where the model was supposed to stand, and sighted directly at the spot where the artist's head would be, if he were sitting upon the stool.

This carried his line of vision to a point some half dozen yards beyond the easel, and, as the line gradually descended, within two feet of the floor. At this point the line of vision stopped at a picture standing upon the floor.

An examination of the picture revealed the presence of a bullet-hole.

Strange as it may seem, this had not been noticed by the police!

"Point No. 1," mused the detective.

He then took a long ruler which he found in the place, and again taking up his position on the platform, attempted to take deliberate aim at the bullet-hole.

This he found he could not do. He could sight about one-half of the picture, but the remainder was shut out by the easel. It was in this hidden half that the bullet had struck!

"Ah!" thought Thad. "Either that picture has been moved since the shot was fired, or the easel has."

"But a moment's examination of the picture on the easel convinced him that neither had been done."

And here was point No. 2.

The bullet had passed through the picture upon which the artist had been at work!

This was an important discovery, for it upset the theory of suicide, and showed the detective that there was more of a case than the inspector had supposed.

It also established the fact that the murderer had either been an expert shot and laid his plans with the nicest precision, or else he had done some exceedingly good guessing.

The pistol with which the deed had been committed was still lying on the floor in the same spot in which it had been discovered, where it had been replaced by order of the inspector after the police and coroner had got through with it. The weapon was a small silver-mounted Smith & Wesson revolver, such as a lady might own; but when Detective Burr came to examine it carefully he discovered the initials "V. G." engraved in the silver work.

This seemed to indicate that the pistol was the property of Vincenzo Gazippe himself, and had evidently been used by the murderer on purpose to establish the theory of suicide.

It also proved pretty conclusively that the murderer was somebody on intimate terms with the artist, or at least knew where he kept his weapons.

Thad next paid a visit to the dressing-room, which was a mere closet partitioned off of one corner of the large room and lighted by one small window.

There was no furniture in this closet, beyond a chair and a small washstand upon which were a bowl and pitcher; and the floor was bare with the exception of a yard square of carpet thrown down loosely in the middle of the floor in lieu of a rug. A few articles of clothing, including drapery of various kinds, hung about the wall, which was also decorated with prints and lithographs.

A few minutes sufficed for a thorough examination of this room, and Thad was about to leave it, when, more out of a spirit of curiosity than the hope of discovering anything, he looked into the pitcher.

It was half-full of water which had evidently stood a long time, but floating on top were a half dozen scraps of a card which had been torn to pieces and thrown in.

The detective fished these scraps out, and found them to have originally been an ordinary business card, but a close inspection showed that there was writing in pencil on the back. The scraps had lain in the water so long that the writing was almost obliterated, but, after putting the bits of card upon the window-sill in the sun until they were dry, Thad re-adjusted the pieces carefully, and then drew forth his pocket-microscope and began the task of trying to decipher the writing.

He soon discovered that his task was no easy one, for, in addition to being almost illegible, the message, whatever it was, was in the Italian language, of which he did not understand a word.

Thad managed to copy the words off, however, on a sheet of paper, and then leaving the studio, made his way to the office of an Italian lawyer of his acquaintance.

The lawyer, whose name was Scovello, laughed when he first glanced at the writing, for Thad,

in his ignorance of the language, had made a good many mistakes in guessing what the letters were, in the original. However, the lawyer soon managed to decipher it, and his face assumed a very grave expression when he had done so.

This is what the writing read, when rendered in plain English:

"Why hesitate any longer, my angel? You are not happy with him, and would be with me. My heart, my fortune, everything is yours, and without you, life is not worth a rush. You *must* be mine, or somebody will have to die! Who shall it be?"

That was all, and there was no signature, or even initials to it.

"Well, this looks as though somebody was in earnest," inferred Scovello. "Where did you get this note?"

"I wrote it," replied Burr.

"Oh, I see. You are studying Italian, eh?"

"Yes, or Italians, rather."

"What is this, anyway?" asked the lawyer, more perplexed than ever.

"A little vendetta among some of your countrymen," replied Thad, laughing, "in which one of them has met the usual fate."

"What is his name?"

"Vincenzo Gazippe."

"Oh, that is the affair, is it? I knew Gazippe very well indeed—a splendid fellow, and a great artist. Oh, yes; I attended his funeral last week. So you are working upon that case are you?"

"Yes."

"What have you discovered thus far, Mr. Burr?"

"Nothing."

"Except this note."

"Yes, except that."

"Do you want me to tell you something that will save you lots of trouble and worry?"

"I certainly do."

"Then stop right where you are."

"Why?" in some astonishment.

"Because you will never make any more out of this case than you have already done."

"What leads you to think so?" sharply, now.

Thad was surprised to see the lawyer grow confused and nervous at this question; and when he attempted to reply he could do nothing at first but stammer.

Finally he made out to answer:

"Because—er—our people, I'm sorry to say, are non-committal in such cases. They absolutely refuse to betray even their bitterest enemies."

The detective eyed the man closely, but the lawyer evaded his gaze and tried his utmost to change the subject. But, it was no use; Thad was firm and cool, and held him to the point.

"I have no doubt," said he, coming back to the subject after Scovello had attempted to switch him off, "that if I depend upon your countrymen for evidence I should make little headway; but we detectives have a way of working independently of human evidence or testimony to a large degree. Besides a silent or equivocating witness frequently tells more than if he had spoken."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Scovello, growing scarlet and more confused than ever.

"Simply," rejoined Thad in a cold, firm voice, "that actions speak louder than words."

Scovello was silent and looked out of the window for some moments. At length he resumed, and his first words showed that he had overcome whatever emotion he had been struggling with, and was as cool as Thad himself.

"Yes, you are right about that Mr. Burr," he said. "I have often noticed it in cross-examining a witness. You are a keen fellow, and may get something out of this case, after all."

"I believe I shall. By the way, do you know anything about a woman Sylvia Carbonetti, whom Gazippe employed as a model?"

"No—that is, yes, I know of her," replied the lawyer becoming a little nervous again. "I know that he had such a person, and that she was said to be very beautiful."

"You do not know whether their relations extended beyond those of an artist and his model, do you?"

At this the Italian became very angry, and, springing to his feet, drew a knife and made a furious lunge at the detective!

CHAPTER II.

THE LIVING MODEL.

WHEN Scovello sprung at Thad, he evidently mistook his man; at least, if he expected to find him unprepared.

True, the action was unexpected, but Thad had had entirely too much experience, and was too good an athlete to be caught unawares.

So, although he did not have time to gain his feet before the lawyer was upon him, he managed to get in a little expert parrying, of which he was a master, and throwing out his fist, struck the fellow's wrist a stinging blow that not only sent the knife spinning into the air, but nearly dislocated the wrist.

Then, before the man could recover from the shock, the detective clutched him by the throat and forced him back into his chair.

The latter was completely cowed, and offered no further resistance; therefore Thad released him, and straightening up in front of him, demanded:

"Now, sir, probably you will explain what you meant by that move."

Scovello was silent for a moment, and scowled malignantly; but, after a little the whole expression of his face changed, and, extending his hand, he said:

"Forgive me, old fellow, I'm a fool! I intended to kill you, of course, but luckily for both of us, you were too cool and too quick for me. Sit down and I will tell you all I know about this affair, and you will then understand the meaning of my sudden impulse."

Without making any reply the detective resumed his seat as deliberately as though nothing had happened.

"I first met Vincenzo Gazippe about five years ago," began the lawyer. "He had recently arrived in this country, and, while he was poor, he had splendid letters of introduction from noted people in Genoa and Florence, showing that he was an artist of no common genius. He was a single man then, but as soon as he was fairly established here, which, through the influence of prominent Italian citizens, was not long, he returned to Italy and married. He brought his wife, a beautiful Florentine, to New York, and they lived happily for some time."

"Gazippe worked hard and earnestly, and soon gained quite a reputation as a painter of nymphs and other studies from the life. Of course, in order to do this class of work he had to have living models, and pretty ones at that. This caused his wife to become jealous, and a good many unpleasant scenes between them was the result."

"She would never leave the studio for a moment, while the model was there, it was said, poor Gazippe did not dare to address a civil word to the model. Even then she would imagine that something was passing between them, and before the model had been in the place a week the wife would insist upon having her discharged. This would often occur at the critical point of his work and greatly hindered his progress, as well as vitiating the results."

"Finally, about a year ago, he got this Carbonetti woman. She proved to be not only an excellent model, but a woman of such determined character, that when, a week or so after her engagement, Gazippe, at the instigation of his wife, attempted to dismiss her, she absolutely refused to go."

"And the worst of it was, she had been sharp enough in the outset to have a contract for a year, and the artist could do nothing."

"He was in a dilemma. The model would not go, and his wife threatened to leave him if he did not get rid of the model."

"At this juncture he called me in to see what could be done in a legal way."

"I tried to compromise matters by buying the woman off, but she wouldn't listen to it. And then, to make matters worse, I became infatuated with Sylvia myself, and from that out began to see, or imagine that Gazippe's relations with her were not what they should have been, and the thought maddened me."

"Well, to come to the point at once, I dropped the case and allowed them to fight it out to suit themselves. From that time I never went near them, up to the day of his death, and I have avoided either discussing the subject or thinking about the woman. So now, old fellow, you can understand why I lost my senses when you asked me whether their relations extended beyond those of an artist and his model."

"What became of the wife?" asked Thad.

"She carried out her threat and returned to Italy."

"And Sylvia—"

"Don't, I implore you!" interrupted the lawyer, "ask me any more about her. I dare not think, much less speak of what they may have been to each other."

"Very well; I will discover that myself," decided Thad, rising to go; "and now I will bid you farewell. I thank you very much for your information, and trust you will control your passion another time. Good-by."

"I shall certainly try," responded the lawyer, laughing; "especially when dealing with you. Good-by, Mr. Burr!"

As Thad left the lawyer's office he had much to think about.

In the first place he did not know what to make of Scovello's story. It hardly appeared reasonable that he would have been wrought up to the point of committing murder by the mention of a woman that he had loved, and the more Thad thought over it, the more convinced he became that the lawyer knew more about the murder than he cared to tell. Had not he said that his people would not betray even an enemy?

Again, if his story about the artist's wife's jealousy was true, there was a direct motive and perhaps a tangible clue.

Then there was the writing on the card which he had recovered from the pitcher and had the lawyer translate. Who was the writer, and whom was he trying to lure away?

His first move was to see the woman who had

acted as Gazippe's model, Sylvia Carbonetti; and to that end he returned to the house in West Twenty-third street, where the studio was located.

He first stopped in the studio and gathered up the fragments of the card which he had found in the pitcher, put them into an envelope, and placed the latter in his pocket for future reference.

Upon entering the studio the detective had left the door slightly ajar, and was surprised, as he turned to leave, to behold the most remarkable looking creature he had ever seen.

It was a man with a long body and short legs, while his face was abnormally long and wide, beardless and flabby as that of an old woman. His eyes were very small and wide apart, and the fellow squinted to such a degree that any one at first sight would think he was fast asleep. His nose was flat and his mouth remarkably wide, and as the man wore a perpetual grin, the mouth was always open, exposing a double row of large, yellow teeth.

When the detective stared at him, as he could not help doing, the strange creature grinned a trifle more, if possible, and asked:

"May I come in?"

"It is hardly worth while," replied Thad, "as I am just going out. What do you want?"

"Nothing, nothing—that is, I didn't know but I might furnish you—if I may say it—"

"What?" demanded the detective, impatiently.

By this time the queer little chap had danced into the room. I say danced, because his gait could be described in no other way; and he never stopped hopping and bobbing about on his little legs, like a bird on a wire spring.

"What I was about to say," he rattled on, in a strange, nasal voice, "was that I might—if I may be allowed—give you some facts in regard to the late tragedy."

Thad was strangely impressed with the fellow, first by his droll appearance, and second, by the fact that his language showed him to be a man of some culture.

"Then you know something about it, do you?" observed the detective.

"I do—that is, if I may be allowed—" here he paused and devoted himself to grinning and hopping.

"Do you live in the building?"

"No—that is—not now."

"You did at the time of the murder, then, did you?"

"Yes—that is—I worked for the artist—and—and—if I may be allowed—slept in the studio."

The detective was interested at once, now confident that he had discovered an important witness.

Therefore he at once closed the door and locked it, preparatory to questioning the fellow.

"So you worked for Gazippe, did you?"

"I did—that is, if—"

"What is your name?" Thad interrupted.

"Nabby Voque—that is—"

"What were your duties, Voque?"

"I attended to his correspondence, ran errands and the like; in fine, made myself generally useful, if I may be allowed—"

"Were you in the studio at the time of the murder?"

"No—that is—"

"Where were you at the time?"

"I was out—that is—on an errand, and—if I may be allowed—"

"Why can't you answer a question directly, without your eternal beating about the bush?" demanded the detective, impatiently. "You were out at the time. How long were you out?"

"A—that is, about a half an hour," replied Voque, who appeared to be weakening under the detective's stern treatment.

"Not more?"

"No—that is—"

"Was anybody in the studio besides the artist when you left?"

"Yes, Miss Carbonetti, the—that is—model."

"No one else?"

"No."

"Was there anybody here when you came back?"

"No," dancing nervously.

"Not even Miss Carbonetti?"

"Not even her; but a man came out of the door as I came up the stairs."

"Ah!" thought Thad, "here is a clew."

"Did you recognize the man?"

"Yes—that is—it was Julio Lavardo, Gazippe's brother-in-law."

This was getting close to home and Thad could scarcely contain himself, so full of the true detective interest was he now.

Here appeared to be almost a clear case.

The detective made haste to follow it up.

"How did he act when you met him?" asked Thad.

"About the same as he always did," replied the little chap.

"Not nervous or excited?"

"No."

"This is strange. What did he say?"

"He said I had better hurry in and do something for the boss, as he was in a bad way."

"Was that all?"

"Yes—that is—yes," balancing himself on one foot. "He hurried away then."

"Then what did you do?"

"I came—that is—came on in here and found the boss shot."

"Did you notify the police?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I was afraid they would arrest me for the murder."

"When the coroner held his inquest, did you go before him and tell what you knew?"

"No. They didn't ask me."

"How is it that you volunteer to tell me?"

"Because I like you—that is, if I may be allowed—and—"

"Where is this Julio Lavardo?"

"I don't know, that is—"

"Do you think you could find him?"

"I think I could—that is—I know where he stays a good deal of the time."

"Will you take me there?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"Yes—that is—yes," dancing about and grinning.

"Very well," with a satisfied air. "Now, Voque, I want to ask you another question. Look at this card," continued the detective, putting the pieces of card together and holding the microscope above it. "Do you recognize that hand-writing?"

Voque gazed at the faded lines for some time, and at length he raised his head and said, in a matter-of-fact way:

"Gazippe's."

"Sure?"

"Yes—that is—yes."

"Have you any idea to whom it was addressed?"

"To Miss Carbonetti."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure? Didn't I carry the card to her in the dressing-room? And didn't she read it and tear it up and throw it into the water-pitcher?"

"Do you know what the writing meant?"

"No—that is—yes."

"Well, what does it say?"

Now for the first time Thad suspected the fellow of lying.

The fact of his knowing that the scraps of card were in the pitcher seemed to the detective to verify what he had previously stated; but now when he was called upon to tell what was in the note, although he had claimed to know, he exhibited a nervousness that told more plainly than words that he did not know.

After stammering for some time, Thad saw that he was trying to invent a lie, so he said:

"Never mind; I see you do not know. Now tell me, did you ever notice any familiarity between the artist and his model?"

"Yes, they were courting all the time, that is—"

"You lie, you misshapen beast!"

This caused them both to start and look around, and the sight that met their gaze gave Thad a real surprise, while Voque turned extremely pale and trembled violently.

The speaker was a tall, handsome woman, with golden hair and blue eyes, and from her striking resemblance to the half-finished picture on the easel, Thad Burr had no difficulty in recognizing her as the living model.

Motioning the little man to be gone with a grand sweep of her beautiful arm, she turned to the detective and said:

"You are doing well, sir, to spend your time listening to this clown's lies."

By this time Voque had made his escape from the room.

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOURAGING DISCOVERY.

THERE was something mutual in the look of astonishment which Thad and Sylvia Carbonetti bestowed upon each other.

She evidently did not expect to find him in the studio, and he could not have been more surprised to see a ghost stalk in through the solid wall than he was to see her.

How she got there was a mystery to him, for he knew of but one entrance—the door—and he had been careful to lock that before commencing his interview with Nabby Voque.

So great was he interested upon this point that, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered from his astonishment to speak, he asked her how she got in.

"The simplest thing in the world," she replied. "There is a back entrance, which I always used when I was in Mr. Gazippe's employ."

"I am right, then, in supposing that this is Miss Carbonetti?"

"You are, sir," she replied in a polite, lady-like voice, that contrasted strangely with her former mood; "and I presume this is a detective."

"Detective Burr, at your service, miss."

The lady bowed graciously and blushed just the merest trifle. Thad saw now that she was not only very beautiful, but was also either very gentle or possessed a wonderful faculty of acting

the part, and he began to understand not only why Gazippe's wife was jealous of her, but also why Scovello had become infatuated with her.

As she uttered the last sentence she sunk gracefully and indolently into an easy-chair, and turned her face graciously but modestly toward the detective as much as to announce that she was ready to talk.

Thad saw, or thought he saw, the necessity of keeping this woman at a distance, and to that end began his interview with a reprimand.

"I presume you were aware, Miss Carbonetti," he began, "that when the Police Department closed this place, it was done for the purpose of excluding all intruders without any exception?"

"Oh, yes," she replied lightly.

"And, therefore, when you entered by means of your private door you were violating the law?"

"I do not doubt it in the least," she ran on.

"But you must know, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Burr."

"Mr. Burr, that a crime is only such in the eyes of that majestic affair called the Law when it is found out. I might have come in here with impunity and still remained the most innocent of creatures, if I had not had the misfortune to find you in on this occasion."

"Your logic is sound, at least," returned Thad, smiling; "and culpable or innocent, we will let it pass for the present. How much of Voque's statement did you hear, Miss Carbonetti?"

"Only the last of it. I came in while he was looking at something with a microscope."

"You do not know what it was that he was looking at, then?"

"No, sir."

"Will you kindly examine this, then," asked Thad, placing the microscope over the bits of card, "and see if you recognize it?"

She rose, and approaching the stand where Thad had placed the particles together, put her eye down near enough for careful examination.

After examining it for some time, she straightened up and shook her head.

"Did you never see it before?" asked the detective.

"Never!" she replied.

"Can you read what it says?"

"No, sir; it is written in some language which I do not understand."

"It is Italian, Miss Carbonetti; surely you can read your own language?"

"You can scarcely call a language one's own that one can neither speak nor read."

"Do you mean to say that you can't even speak Italian, Miss Carbonetti?"

"Certainly. You see, while my father was Italian my mother is English, and our mothers teach us to speak, Mr. Burr."

"I see. Well, do you recognize that writing?"

She examined it again and replied:

"I do not."

"Would you know Gazippe's writing if you should see it?"

"I might; but I cannot say whether that is his or not. Your best plan will be to get some of his writing and compare it with this. You will find plenty of it around here."

"I thank you for the suggestion," observed Thad. "But I was anxious to know whether you would recognize it or not. You deny, then, that the card was written to yourself, as stated by Voque, and that you read it, tore it and threw it into the pitcher?"

"I deny ever having seen it before," she exclaimed, vehemently.

"Do you also deny Voque's other statement, that you and the artist were in the habit of flirting, and that his wife was insanely jealous of you?"

"I deny that anything beyond the merest civilities ever passed between Mr. Gazippe and myself; but I do not deny that his wife was jealous. She was jealous of every woman that her husband looked at."

"Where is she now?"

"I do not know. She was reported to have gone back to Italy, but I do not know whether she did or not."

"Do you know anything about her brother, Julio Lavardo?"

"I have seen him here."

"Was he on good terms with this artist?"

"So far as I know."

"Now, Miss Carbonetti, let me ask you: This note, when translated into English, appears to be a tender appeal of some man for some woman to leave some other man and go with him. Have you any idea who such a note could be from about here, and whom it is likely to be intended for?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Who is this queer looking creature they call, or at least he calls himself, Namby Voque?"

"He is a half-witted creature whom Mr. Gazippe employed to run errands and the like."

"What is his reputation for truthfulness, Miss Carbonetti?"

"He is a most remarkable liar. He will lie when the truth would suit him better."

"Now; I would like to ask you a few questions touching yourself, Miss Carbonetti," pur-

sued Thad. "I believe you were examined by the coroner at the inquest, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And acquitted, of course."

"I am happy to say that I was."

"Where were you when the tragedy occurred?"

"Back there in the dressing-room."

"You heard the report of the pistol, then?"

"I did."

"And it excited no alarm or curiosity in you—that is, enough to cause you to run out and see what had occurred?"

"None at all, sir. You see, Mr. Gazippe was in the habit of firing at a target and I had got so used to hearing the report of his pistol that it never surprised me to hear it at any time. Sometimes he would suddenly spring up from his work, drop his brush, grab his pistol, and commence firing."

"Didn't he sometimes spoil a picture by the operation?" asked Thad.

"He frequently shot holes through them," she replied. "See this," she continued, approaching the easel and pointing at the hole through the picture of Calypso which the detective had discovered. "He shot that only a day or two before he was killed."

Thad's heart dropped into his boots, so to speak.

Here was a beautiful theory exploded, and one on which he had taken some pride in discovering when the police had failed to do so.

It was a full minute before he had courage to continue the interview.

Finally he subdued his feelings enough to ask:

"How came he to do that?"

"He was speaking about optical calculation, and he said that he could look at a button on the front of a man's coat and then walk behind him and shoot the button off from the rear. I laughed at the idea, and he also laughed, and said that the difficulty would be in finding some one willing to allow him to try the experiment. 'However,' he said, 'Calypso won't kick,' and marking a certain spot on the picture, stepped back to the dais where I stood, and fired."

The detective sighed.

It began to look as though the inspector's theory of suicide was a good one, after all.

Still, he did not despair, and, after a moment of thoughtful silence, went on:

"So you did not come out into the studio on hearing the shots?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"How soon did you hear of the tragedy?"

"Not for several hours after. It was about noon when I left the dais, and Mr. Gazippe told me that I needn't come down any more that day, as he was going to put in some work on the picture in which he would need no model. My first knowledge of the affair was when the police came up and arrested me in the afternoon."

"Who discovered the body?"

"Julio Lavardo, I believe."

"Was anybody with the artist when you left the dais or platform?"

"No, sir; he was alone."

"And you heard no talking after you went into the dressing-room?"

"No, sir."

"Where was Voque at the time?"

"Out, I think."

"Have you formed any opinion in the matter, Miss Carbonetti, as to whether the artist was murdered or committed suicide?"

"Not much; although I am inclined to think he committed suicide."

"Why?"

"Simply because there was nobody to kill him, so far as I can see."

"Did he ever talk of taking his own life?"

"Not in my hearing, but he was erratic and what is commonly called cranky at times, and I know he had lots of trouble."

"Had he any enemies, so far as you know?"

"No, sir, I do not know of any. There was one man who used to come in here, and Mr. Gazippe would always look displeased when he saw him coming. They would have long talks which sounded like quarreling, and the artist was always pale and nervous after the conversation."

"When was he in last?"

"Just a little while before I went out and the shot was fired."

"But he left before you did?"

"Yes, sir; he was gone before I left the dais."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes, sir; it is Harold Chester."

"He is not an Italian, then?"

"No, sir; although he speaks Italian, and most of their conversations were held in that language."

"Can you describe him?"

"Yes. He is tall and fine-looking, with light hair and mustache, blue-gray eyes and a mild manner. By the way," she cried suddenly, running across the room and picking up a small, rough, unfinished study of a man's head, and bringing it to the detective, "this is the man."

Thad took the picture, and the moment his eyes rested on the features he was thunder-struck.

The original of the picture could not have re-

sembled the woman before him any more closely if he had been her own brother!

She must have divined his thoughts, for when he looked up at her she was both smiling and blushing a little.

"Do you see any resemblance?" were her first words.

"More than that," he affirmed stoutly. "It is your image."

She laughed lightly and blushed again.

"That is what everybody says," she remarked in a casual voice; "and yet it is a mere coincidence. There is not the remotest relationship between us."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

But while she said this with apparent candor and earnestness, Thad could not help noticing an expression of confusion and annoyance in her face that led him to believe there was some mystery connected with the affair.

After a moment of silence, the detective said:

"I will not detain you any longer at present, Miss Carbonetti. I wish to make some investigations here, in which I would prefer to be alone. I thank you for the information you have furnished, and I may take the liberty of calling upon you, with your permission, at another time."

"Very well," she said. "I will go. If you wish to see me at any time you will find me in the second flat above. Good-day, sir."

"Good-day, Miss Carbonetti!" responded Thad, politely.

As soon as she was gone, he began a systematic search, first for a specimen of Gazippe's penmanship. This he was not long in discovering, and at once compared it with the writing on the mutilated card, and found that it was not the same.

Having satisfied himself upon this point, he looked further.

In the artist's desk he found a great many papers, among them letters from various people.

Some of these he took from the envelopes and, when they were in English, read them.

Finally he ran across one, the penmanship of which at once attracted his attention.

The hand was unmistakably the same as that on the card!

He hastened to open it, and to his delight found that it was written in English, and of recent date.

It ran as follows:

"S. GNOR GAZIPPE:—

Recent revelations have proven conclusively to my mind that what I accused you of to your face, and you vehemently denied, is only too true. Apart from the relationship which you know to exist, although she does not, there are other considerations which impel me to demand that this matter go no further.

"All my admonitions to her are of no avail, so I appeal to you.

"I offer no threat, but rely upon your knowledge of my disposition as sufficient warning that I mean just what I say.

"You are aware that you owe your safety so far to me, for only for the restraint I keep on the other you would long since have fared badly.

"Hoping you may take warning in time, I am still,

"Your friend,

"HAROLD CHESTER."

Here, at least, was a clue, thought Thad.

But, after a little consideration of the matter he decided that it proved nothing one way or the other. The implied threat might, after all, have driven the artist to self-destruction.

However, he was bound to see Harold Chester and satisfy himself, as far as possible, upon the matter.

CHAPTER IV.

LOOKS LIKE A CLUE.

NOTWITHSTANDING what Sylvia Carbonetti had told Thad about the incident of the artist shooting the hole through the picture himself, he could not make up his mind to relinquish the idea that there was something else in the affair.

Any man dislikes to give up a pet theory, and Thad was not above the weakness.

So, when he had got through with the papers, he could not resist the temptation of mounting the model's dais again and sighting along the imaginary course of the murderous bullet.

Having done this, he was about to descend from the platform when, chancing to glance down at his feet, his attention was attracted by some object on the floor that glittered.

On picking it up he was surprised to find that it was a diamond ear-drop.

At first he thought it was some cheap affair dropped there possibly by some servant or child, or even Miss Carbonetti herself, whom he could not imagine able to afford anything genuine; but when he took it into a strong light he was satisfied that it was a real stone, and that, too, of a fine quality.

This caused him great surprise, because if it had been lost by any of the artist's rich patrons, they certainly would have made some inquiry.

After some thought, however, he came to the conclusion that the jewel might have belonged to the model, and decided to call upon her at once and ascertain.

He was still surveying the precious little trinket in his hand, and at the same time walking mechanically toward the door, when he was suddenly aroused from his reverie by the familiar nasal voice saying:

"If I may be allowed—"

And looking up, beheld the grotesque form and grinning face of Namby Voque.

"Well?" was the detective's salutation.

"Well—if I may be allowed—" returned the little fellow, and then stopping short in his speech as usual, held a crumpled and dirty piece of paper toward the detective.

Without a word Burr took it and, after straightening out the wrinkles, found that something was written in pencil on the paper.

After some difficulty he made out to read the following:

"Go to the studio about noon. The model leaves at that time, and he is most likely then to be alone. Make a clean job of it, and call at the usual place for your reward. Better go alone, as one can escape observation better than two or more. However, if you think I better to have a guard outside, take Hank along, but leave him in the hall; or, better still, on the sidewalk."

That was all. There was no name or initials signed to it, and the writing was so badly scrawled, probably from having been written while held upon the knee or in some equally inconvenient place, that it was impossible to tell whether it belonged to anybody whose writing he had ever seen or not.

Whoever had written it, however, or whoever it was intended for, Thad was satisfied that it referred to the present case, and he began to think he had struck a clue at last.

Looking up at the misshapen Voque, who had brought it, and who was at that moment balancing himself upon first one leg and then the other, and grinning, he demanded:

"Where did you get this?"

"From—if I may be allowed—a fellow in a saloon on—that is—on Third avenue," replied Voque.

"Who is the fellow, and how did you get it from him?"

"Listen—that is—listen, and—if I may be allowed—I will tell you all about it."

"Very well," returned Thad, sternly; "but see that you tell me the truth, Voque, for I find you do not always tell the truth."

The fellow made no reply to this, but gave the detective a look of surprise that seemed to indicate either that it was strange that anybody should ever doubt his word or expect him to tell the truth.

He was silent so long that Thad was prone to tell him to go on with his story, again admonishing him to tell nothing but the truth, and, above all, to avoid his eternal equivocations.

"It was like this," he resumed after a little, "if I may be allowed—after I left here I went to Third avenue to attend to some business, and dropped into a saloon—that is, to see a man—I don't drink myself—if I may be allowed—"

"Never mind about your drinking or not drinking," interrupted Thad, impatiently. "Although judging from your breath, I should imagine that you had at least smoked a flavored cigar. Go on with your story, and be brief about it."

"Well, as I was saying—if I may be allowed—I went into the saloon on Third avenue to see a man—it is a low sort of a place—if I may be allowed—and didn't find the man. I peeped into a little reading-room back of the bar, and whom do you suppose I saw?"

"I have no idea."

"Mr. Harold Chester."

"Yes?" exclaimed Thad, thoroughly interested now. "Well?"

"I was surprised to see him in such a place, for he's a pretty tony chap. He didn't see me, as he was engaged in reading a paper, and I closed the door softly without letting him see me."

"Then I turned and was about leaving the saloon, when two villainous-looking fellows came in, one of them very drunk."

"They shuffled up to the bar, and, as I thought they were tramps, I expected to see the barkeeper fire them out, but instead of that he set a bottle and some glasses upon the bar, and after they had taken a drink, the barkeeper handed each of them a roll of bills. After that they drank some more and talked a great deal, and finally the barkeeper pointed toward the reading-room, and the two ruffians staggered back and went in."

"I expected to see Mr. Chester come bolting out at once, as I couldn't think of him staying in the same room with those rough, drunken fellows; but he didn't. I waited a long time, and finally one of the ruffians came out, the drunkest one, and after fumbling in his pockets for a while, staggered out of the saloon."

"While fumbling in his pockets this paper fell upon the floor, and as soon as he was gone I picked it up and put it into my pocket. As soon as I got out of the place I went to a light and read it, and finding what it was, I brought it to you."

"You did well," said Thad. "But do you think it at all likely that Chester had anything to do with the ruffians?"

"I don't know—that is—but I heard him and the one that remained in the room talking after the other left."

"Then there is no doubt about it. Do you imagine they will still be there?"

"I shouldn't wonder—that is—the ruffian at least. He was about drunk enough, I should think, to go to sleep pretty soon."

"Very well. Take me to the place at once. I will see what can be got out of the ruffian, at all events."

Without a moment's hesitation Thad locked the studio and, in company with the queer little chap, started for Third avenue.

To expedite matters and avoid observation, he called a hack as soon as they got into the street, and had themselves driven at a rapid gait to the place described by Voque, which was near Ninth street.

As soon as they arrived at the saloon Thad and his companion alighted and entered.

That the barkeeper might not suspect his mission, the detective bought a cigar for himself and a drink for Voque, and then sauntered indifferently back to the reading-room, opened the door and walked in, followed by Voque.

Nobody was there but two villainous-looking wretches, both snoring lustily.

Thad turned and looked at the little man for an explanation, but the expression of surprise on his face showed that he was as much in the dark as the detective himself.

After surveying the rascals for a moment, Thad whispered to Voque and asked him which one of them had dropped the note.

The little fellow was puzzled to tell for some time, although there was very little resemblance between them aside from the fact that they were both ragged and dirty.

Finally, however, he settled upon one, and the detective approached the fellow and woke him up.

It required a good deal of shaking to bring the ruffian to a state of consciousness where he could talk intelligently.

Even then it was next to impossible to impress anything upon his whisky-sodden brain.

"Was ma'r, was ma'r?" was about all Thad could get out of him.

"Wake up, here, and I'll show you what the matter is," said Thad. "I'm an officer of the law, and want you."

"Wha' for?" mumbled the fellow.

"Murder!"

"Mur'r? Who I mur'r? I didn't mur'r nobody, I didn't."

"Listen," said Thad, giving him another shake to prevent him from going to sleep again. "I know all about you and your actions, but if you will answer my questions straight I won't arrest you, just now, at least."

"Was ye wan' me ter answer?"

"Who hired you to kill the artist Gazippe?"

"Nobody (hic), I didn't kill 'm."

"Don't lie to me!" roared the detective. "I know better. Now, tell me the truth, or I'll run you in."

"But I tell ye I didn't!" protested the ruffian, rapidly sobering under the influence of fright.

"Listen," said Thad. "Did you ever hear anything about this?" and he read him the note which Voque said fell from the fellow's pocket.

At its conclusion Thad was disappointed to see that it had made no impression upon him, and he asked:

"Did you never hear that before?"

"Nev'r," replied the drunken man.

"Did you never read it?"

"Nev'r."

The detective was perplexed.

If the fellow had shown any signs of nervousness or fear under his severe catechizing, there would have been some hope of getting something out of him; and drunk as he was he would, Thad was quite sure, have exhibited some indications of guilt if he had committed the awful crimes of which he was accused.

Under the circumstances the detective did not even feel justified in arresting him, and was about to give the matter up as another one of Voque's lies, when a thought occurred to him.

"Look here, my good fellow," he began, "do you know Harold Chester?"

At the mention of the name the fellow jumped as though you had stuck a pin into him.

Thad thought he had struck the right trail at last, and followed it up, although the fellow had not answered his question.

"I thought you did," continued Thad. "You had some dealings with him in which you did a job for him, and you and your pal were rewarded for it to-day."

The fellow's only reply was a stupefied stare, which the detective could not tell whether it meant surprise or conviction.

"Come, am I right?" he went on.

"Eh?" gasped the ruffian.

"Am I right in saying that you had some dealings with Chester, and got your money for the job to-day in this place?"

"No," was the sullen reply.

"Then you deny it?"

"Yes."

"What did the barkeeper give you a roll of bills for this afternoon?"

"Tha's my biz'ess," doggedly.

"Very well," exclaimed Thad, sternly. "There is but one thing left for me, and that is to turn you over to the police."

This threat, to his surprise, had no more effect upon the fellow than the rest of his conversation had had.

He therefore told Voque to go out on the street and fetch a couple of policemen.

In the mean time, while the little chap was gone, Thad went out and interviewed the barkeeper.

"Do you know the two fellows in the back room?" he asked.

"Mebbe I do, an' mebbe I don't," was the bartender's sneering reply.

"Oh, all right," said Thad carelessly. "I thought if you knew them you might give me an introduction, that's all."

"Well, I don't keep no track of all de tramps dat comes in here, see?"

"Perhaps not," rejoined Thad, coolly, "but I didn't know but you might enjoy the pleasure of these gentlemen's acquaintance. No harm done, I hope. Have something?"

At this invitation the fellow melted somewhat, and after some talk apologized for his blunt answer.

Having got him in an amiable frame of mind the detective asked him if he hadn't paid the two fellows a sum of money that afternoon.

"Yes, I give two fella's named Sline and Duggan some sugar dat was left here fer 'em," he replied.

"Who was the party that left the money?" Thad inquired.

"Dat's more'n I kin tell."

"Didn't he give his name?"

"No, at least I don't think so."

"Was he a tall, light-complexioned man, with a heavy blonde mustache?"

"He was tall and light; but he didn't have no mustache. He was smug like yerself, see?"

This was a puzzler; but as Voque with the two policemen were entering the door at that moment Thad hastened to ask one more question.

"Do you know Harold Chester when you see him?"

"No, I don't know no such person," was the reply.

And then he hastened from behind the bar to find out what the policemen wanted in the back room; but Thad intercepted him by stepping in front of him with the remark:

"Just stay behind your bar, old fellow, if you do not want to go down too."

The fellow measured Thad's gigantic form with his eye, and then slunk behind the bar, without a word.

Thad then followed the policemen into the back room and explained the case to them. After which they took the two ruffians into custody.

They had no easy task in getting them as far as the nearest patrol-box, as neither of them was able to walk unaided, especially the one that had been asleep, who was completely helpless.

It was growing dark by this time, and Thad took a hack and drove back to Broadway and Twenty-third street, intending as soon as he could get his dinner, to call upon Sylvia Carbonetti.

CHAPTER V.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

It was nearly eight o'clock in the evening when Thad rung the bell of the flat in West Twenty-third street occupied by Miss Carbonetti and her mother.

The door was promptly opened by the young lady herself, who was evidently surprised, although not displeased to see the detective.

"Come in," she said, graciously. "To what am I indebted for this pleasure?"

"I hope I am not intruding, Miss Carbonetti?" rejoined Thad. "I told you, if you remember, that I might call upon you; but this is rather sooner than I expected. In fact, it is not in connection with the case that I called."

"What is it then, pray?" she asked, blushing as though she apprehended that he might have come to propose marriage.

In the mean time they had both walked into the little sitting-room, and the young lady, after motioning him to a chair, sat down herself.

"I came to ask you," he said, "whether you had lost anything or not—any article of jewelry."

Her look of mingled surprise and bewilderment seemed to indicate that she feared that there was something hidden in the meaning of his question, and it was a full minute before she summoned courage to answer.

"I lose anything?" she gasped at last.

"Yes, miss, a diamond ear-drop," he replied, holding up the jewel.

"Mercy, sir," she declared, growing very nervous with apprehension. "I never owned such a thing in my life, sir."

There was too much earnestness in her words for him to doubt their truth.

"Pardon me, Miss Carbonetti," he resumed; "but as I found this little trinket on the dais in the studio where you have been in the habit of standing as a model, I did not know but you might have dropped it there."

"No, sir," she rejoined, growing more calm, now that she began to realize that he wasn't attempting to trap her in any way; "as I said, I never had anything so expensive in my life."

"Did you ever take sufficient notice of the artist's lady patrons to remark the kind of jewelry they wore?"

"I do not know that I have, sir. I have noticed that some of them wore diamonds and a great many of them; but I cannot recall the appearance of any particular one now."

"Won't you please examine that ear-drop and see if you ever saw anything like it before?" he asked, holding the jewel toward her.

She took it and turned it to the light.

The next moment a strange scared expression appeared in her face.

The ear-drop was of such a peculiar pattern that any one having seen it once would know it ever afterward.

It consisted of an immense serpent coiled up with its head in the center, and holding the diamond, which was very large, in its mouth.

Before the young lady had time to reply, however, her mother, a quiet, ladylike woman entered, and Sylvia rose from her seat and said:

"My mother, Mr. Burr."

And then without waiting for the introduced parties to more than bow, she held the ear-drop up before her mother's eyes and exclaimed:

"Look, mamma, Mr. Burr found this ear-drop in his studio—on the dais where I stand. Do you know whom it belongs to?"

The old lady took it, and adjusting her glasses, examined it for a moment.

And then Thad noticed the same expression in her face that he had seen in the daughter's.

Before answering she gave the detective a look that seemed to ask a thousand questions at once, then then turning to her daughter again, she said:

"Why, my dear, that is exactly like the ear-drop worn by the lady we took care of!"

"I know it is, mamma; but what puzzles me is how it got down there."

"It is quite as mysterious to me, my child," replied the mother.

But at this point she appeared to realize that their conversation was enigmatical to their visitor, and she turned to Thad to explain.

"It was a strange occurrence, sir," she began. "It was about six months ago, I think, that one day just after Sylvia came up from the studio, Mr. Gazippe came running up, out of breath, to ask me if I would allow a lady, who had met with an accident, to be brought into my place. I consented at once, of course, and she was carried up-stairs by three or four men (although one might have carried her, she was so small,) and laid upon the bed."

"We never knew exactly what the nature of the accident was. Mr. Gazippe, being asked, only explained that she had come into the studio and fallen."

"The lady was unconscious at the time, but we examined her and found no marks or bruises of any kind."

"The doctor soon brought her to, and in a few hours she appeared to be well enough, but pretended to be afraid to go out and asked the privilege of remaining a few days. I had no objection to her doing so, and so she stayed on for more than two weeks. For the most part she was extremely gentle, and there was no doubt about her being an educated and talented woman; but at times she would have eccentric moods, and then she would be very disagreeable."

"Well, as I say, she was here a little more than two weeks. Toward the close of that time she began to talk of going away. One day I had to go out, and, as Sylvia was in the studio, the lady was left alone for several hours."

"When I returned, late in the afternoon (Sylvia was still in the studio), I was horrified to find her lying in the middle of the floor, bound and gagged, and the ring torn from her right ear."

"She was unconscious when I entered the room, but when I restored her to consciousness she told me that a tall man with light hair and mustache had opened the door with a key, and as she supposed that it was either myself or my daughter, she paid no attention to him until she suddenly found him standing before her; and then, before she could escape, or call for help, he bound and gagged her and tore the ring from her ear."

"He appeared to be satisfied with that, and did not offer to take the other ring or any of her other jewelry, or her money, although she had plenty of both, but when he had brutally torn the ring out of her ear he went as quietly as he had come."

"The police were notified, but, as usual, they succeeded in finding out nothing about the affair, I believe. At all events, they never found the culprit or the ear-drop. In fact I don't believe they tried very hard, for I know they were inclined to scoff at the affair, and one detective was bold enough to tell me that he believed the woman to be a crank and that she had done the whole thing herself."

"I might have believed in this theory myself, only for the fact that the ring had been torn from her ear, and what seemed to me the

impossibility of tying her own hands behind her back."

"And you think this is the ear-drop that was torn from her ear, do you?" said Thad.

"It is exactly like it," replied the old lady.

"It is undoubtedly the same," rejoined the daughter.

"What was the lady's name?" asked Thad.

"Bianca Petero was the name she gave," responded the old lady.

"An Italian?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what became of her?"

"No, sir. She left in a day or two after the occurrence and we have never heard of her since."

"Did Gazippe know nothing about her?"

"So he claimed."

"It is a strange case," declared the detective. "Was your daughter suspected by anybody—enemies I mean—of having anything to do with the affair?"

"At first, yes. But as she was in the studio all the time she had no trouble in proving an alibi, even if the lady herself had not testified that she was not in the flat during the time."

"And the artist, was he not suspected?"

"In the same way, yes, sir. But he also proved that he was in the studio during the whole time."

"By whom, your daughter?"

"Not only her, but two other witnesses."

"That was fortunate for him as well as for your daughter, Mrs. Carbonetti," said the detective. "It was also fortunate that the ear-drop wasn't found in the studio at that time. For that fact, combined with the other that nobody was supposed to have a key to your apartments but the members of your own family, might have made it appear badly for you."

Mother and daughter exchanged apprehensive glances at this hint, but neither said anything.

"I believe you told me that you knew Mr. Chester, did you not, Miss Carbonetti?" resumed Thad.

"Yes, sir, slightly."

"Was your mother acquainted with him?"

"No, sir," replied that lady for herself.

"Then it is not likely that he could have had a key, is it?"

"No, sir."

"And yet does it not occur to you, Miss Carbonetti, that the description of the man who committed the outrage corresponds with that of Harold Chester?"

"I have often thought of it," rejoined the young lady. "I have never seen him since without thinking of poor Miss Petero and her diamond ear-drop."

"She was a young lady, then, was she?"

"About twenty-five, I should think, and as she never told us to the contrary, we always imagined that she was a maiden."

"Now, with regard to Chester, I believe you told me to-day that he and the artist used to quarrel a good deal?"

"Yes, sir."

"You never knew the cause, did you?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever hear Gazippe say anything about the character of the man?"

"Only once, and then he said that it was a pity that a man of Mr. Chester's wealth, talent and good looks should be so devoid of moral character."

"Not a very flattering recommendation, eh, Miss Carbonetti?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any idea where he lives?" asked the detective.

"No, sir, I have not," she replied.

"Now, Miss Carbonetti, if you or your mother will give me a description of this Bianca Petero, I won't trouble you any longer."

"Certainly. Mamma, you tell Mr. Burr what she is like."

"Well," began the old lady, "as I told you before, one man could easily carry her up-stairs. That is to say, she is very small. Will not weigh over ninety pounds, I should think."

"Oh, yes, mamma," interrupted the daughter, "she will weigh more than that. She is small, but solid."

"At all events, she is very small," continued the mother; "dark, and rather pretty. By the way, Sylvia, we have a photograph of her. Let Mr. Burr see that."

"Or, better still," suggested Sylvia, rising to get the picture, "give it to him. We have no use for it."

"Not at all," interposed Thad. "I wouldn't think of accepting it. But I shall be obliged to you if you will allow me to look at it."

"Here it is," said Sylvia, holding it out to him.

Thad took the picture, and after examining it carefully for some minutes, handed it back with the remark:

"I thank you; that is quite sufficient. I have taken a mental copy of it that will not fade as soon as the photograph. I have the best part of the lady now," he continued. "Her photograph and her jewels."

He then thanked the mother and daughter for their courtesy and took his leave.

When he got down to the floor on which the

studio was situated, the detective was surprised to see Namby Voque outlined in the dim light, and near him, but further back in the shadow, another person, whose features he could not discern.

As soon as Thad was sufficiently near, the little fellow whispered:

"I've got him, sir—that is—I've got him!"

"Who?" asked the detective, in surprise.

"Him. The man you want," replied the little man. "Open the door till I take him in."

Thad could not imagine who the little fellow had or what he was up to, but to humor him as well as to find out, he opened the studio door.

Instantly, to the detective's surprise, Voque grabbed the unknown man in the shadow and pushed him into the room.

Thad locked the door and then lit the gas.

He was still more surprised now that he could see, for the fellow was tightly bound with ropes, so that he could not move a hand or step more than a foot at a time.

He was a rough-looking customer and twice as large as Voque.

Thad could not suppress a smile at the oddity of the whole situation, as well as the air of importance of the little chap.

The fellow hung his head in a dogged fashion, but it was easily seen that he was completely cowed for some reason or other.

"What do ye think of him—that is—Mr. Burr?" asked Voque, grinning from ear to ear, and dancing about like a hen on a hot griddle.

"He looks like a bad one," replied Thad smiling. "But who and what is he, and when did you get him?"

"Well, to commence with—if I may be allowed—he is the fellow that dropped the paper I gave you, and—if I—"

"The fellow that dropped the paper? What do you mean?"

"Only that and nothing more—if I may be allowed to quote—"

"But you told me that the fellow we found in the saloon, and who is now locked up, was the man," interposed Thad indignantly.

"So I thought—that is—but look at this chap—ain't he the dead image of the other one?"

"He does look a good deal like him," admitted Thad.

"Of course he does—that is—and how can you blame me for—if I may—"

"But how did you know that this was the right one?" interrupted the detective.

"Because he resembles—that is, if I may be allowed—himself a little more than the other one; besides, he admits the fact of being himself—that is—the man that dropped the scrap of paper!"

CHAPTER VI.

A CONFESSION.

THAD was so much surprised by this announcement that he did not speak for a minute or two.

Finally he said:

"Come, sit down, Voque, and let your prisoner sit down also; I want to know, first, how you managed to capture him, and then I desire to question him a little."

For some unaccountable reason, the fellow paid no more attention to all the conversation that passed, even when it concerned himself, than if he had been as deaf as a post.

When they were all seated, Voque beside his prisoner and Thad facing them, the latter began:

"Now tell me, Voque, how you, a little mite of a chap, managed to capture this big burly ruffian."

He made this last remark for a purpose, and as he uttered it, watched the prisoner's face intently. To his surprise and disappointment, it had not the slightest effect.

"The fellow's either deaf or an imbecile," mused the detective.

"Well," began Voque, "when you took the back and left me to foot it—that is, to walk—"

"You had disappeared at the time," interposed Thad, "or I should have invited you to ride."

"That's all right," continued Voque; "I had disappeared, and you'll know why in a moment. You see, I wasn't satisfied that the fellow whom I saw go out had returned. He appeared to be so drunk at the time that it struck me he would be most likely to go off somewhere and go to sleep. So I took a look back in the yard behind the saloon."

"Did you find him there?"

"No. And when I got back you had gone. Then I took another drink—"

"Notwithstanding the fact that you never drink," interrupted Thad.

"Yes, but you see this was a peculiar circumstance—great pressure—if I may be allowed—and—well I took a drink, and then pretended to get very drunk. All for effect, you understand. I gossiped with the barkeeper awhile, and finally all of a sudden pretended to miss somebody. 'Who are you lookin' fer?' asked the bartender. 'My pal,' replied I. 'Who is yer pal?' asked he. 'Burk,' said I, at a venture. 'You're drunk,' said he; 'you mean Buck. Where is he?' 'Gone home,' replied he. 'Which means as much as telling me that it's

none of my business," said I. "Why?" he asked. "Cause I don't know no more'n the man in the moon where this cove lives." "A fine chum, you are," remarked the bartender, and then up and told me where he lived.

"I followed his directions, which took me away down on Avenue A, in a dirty tenement-house. I climbed four pairs of stairs, and finally came to the apartments of his nibs, here.

"I was met at the door by an old woman, who was crying drunk. You know what that means, Mr. Burr?"

"Yes."

"And I asked for Buck. She commenced bawling at that, and said he wasn't in. That convinced me that he was, so I pushed her out of the way and went in.

"Did you find him?"

"Yes; in bed, asleep."

"How did you manage?"

"Manage? I made the fellow get up, and, with the old woman's aid, dress himself. But the trouble was to get him down-stairs."

"How did you get him down?"

"Carried him."

There was something so astounding, not to say incredible, about this statement, that Thad was loth to credit it.

He mused for some moments upon the matter before questioning the little fellow any further, and was on the point once or twice of contradicting the narrator.

The recollection of what Miss Carbonetti had told him in regard to Voque's untruthfulness stimulated his incredulity.

But after some thought the detective came to the conclusion that a little exaggeration in this particular part of the narrative did not matter so much, and he again addressed himself to the little man.

"Well, after you got your man down-stairs, how did you manage it?" he asked.

"Walked him right along," rejoined Voque.

"And he offered no resistance?"

"No, sir."

"How do you account for that?"

"Well, in the first place, I had him tied so that he couldn't do anything, anyway, and then all these fellows are afraid of me."

There was something so incredible in all this that the detective not only did not believe the statement, but he began to suspect that there was some trick connected with it.

What the nature of the trick was, or what its motive could be, he could not divine, of course; but his suspicions were aroused, and he determined to watch the fellow closely.

Thad then turned to the prisoner.

"So you confess to having been in possession of the note found by Namby Voque, do you?" he said.

The fellow nodded in the affirmative.

"Where did you get the note?"

The prisoner looked at Voque, but did not answer.

"He got it from Chester," interposed Voque.

"Let him answer for himself," commanded Thad, sternly. "He must answer for himself. Who gave you that note, sir?"

"Chester," came the almost inaudible reply.

"Who is Chester?"

The fellow gave another appealing glance at Voque, but remained silent.

"Harold Chester," answered Voque.

"I told you to allow the prisoner to answer his own questions, Voque," said Thad, sternly. "But as I see you disregard my orders, I shall have to ask you to leave the room until I am through questioning him."

"Do you want me to go out?" asked the little fellow in an appealing whine.

"I do."

"But he is my prisoner, and—"

"He is mine now."

"But I had all the trouble of capturing him."

"For which you will be amply rewarded, if he turns out to be in any way connected with the murder. Now go."

Voque was about to make another appeal, but before he had time to do so, the detective took him by the shoulder and hurried him out the door, and then shut the door and locked it.

This was a turn of affairs that neither Voque or his prisoner was expecting, evidently, and when Thad had got back to the prisoner he found that he had undergone a radical change.

Instead of the stolid indifference which had characterized him before, he appeared to be nervous and keenly sensible to his situation.

Thad sat down in front of the fellow and fastening him with his keen eye, began:

"What is your name?"

"Er—Jones," faltered the prisoner.

"No it isn't," thundered Thad. "Do not attempt any equivocation with me. I won't have it. The best thing you can do is to answer my questions correctly, for I have a way of compelling stubborn people. What is your name? Buck what?"

"Buck—"

The fellow hesitated.

"Well?"

The ruffian shuddered. The sound of Thad's voice seemed to thrill him like an electric shock.

His eyes were pinned on the floor and he appeared unable to articulate.

"Answer," commanded Thad, "or I shall be compelled to apply my unfailing remedy."

The mention of the mysterious unfailing remedy, whatever it might be, seemed to fill the fellow with an unutterable dread.

He shook like an aspen.

But still he was silent.

So was the detective.

But he arose deliberately at this point, and taking a small silver tube from his pocket, drew the instrument out as you would a telescope.

The prisoner's eyes arose from the floor and became fixed upon the little instrument.

Thad made a move in his direction, and the ruffian threw himself back, became livid with terror, while a pitiful, appealing expression overspread his face.

"Don't! don't!" he cried. "Please don't!"

"Will you answer?"

"Yes—as far as I kin."

Thad returned the instrument to his pocket and sat down.

"What is your name?" he demanded.

"Buck Sliney," came the prompt reply in a tremulous voice.

"Well, Sliney, where did you get that paper?"

"Chester give it to me."

"Yes. Well, who is Chester?"

"I—I dunno," faltered the prisoner, his eyes sinking to the floor again.

"How did he happen to give you that paper, if you do not know him?"

"He found us in de saloon dere, an' spottin' us for de kind o' birds he wanted ter use, nailed us."

"Whom do you mean by 'us'?"

"Me an' me pal."

"Who is your pal?"

"Hank Mellon."

"He is the Hank referred to in the note, is he not?"

"Yes."

"Well, Chester made a bargain with you, did he?"

"Yes."

"What did he want you to do?"

"Put a cove out o' de way."

"And you did it?"

"Yes—dat is, Hank done it."

"What did you do?"

"Stood guard."

"So you didn't see the deed committed?"

"No."

"Who was the victim?"

"I dunno—some Dago or 'nuther."

"You don't remember his name?"

"No."

"Did not Chester mention his name?"

"Dunno's he did. Don't recollect if he did."

"Where was the deed committed?"

"In de fella's study I tink dey calls it. He was a artist."

"Where was this studio, or study as you call it, located?"

"Right bhar. Dis is de place."

The fellow's answers had been remarkably accurate up to this point. There was one more question, however, upon which the detective depended a great deal.

And he hastened to put it.

"At what time of day was the murder committed?" he asked.

"I—I don't recollect," the fellow finally faltered, after some hesitation.

"About what time? Can't you guess somewhere near the time?"

"No," he finally answered.

"Was it day or night?"

The fellow grew extremely nervous at this. He hesitated, stammered, and finally replied in almost inaudible tones:

"Night, o' course."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

That settled the question in Thad's mind.

To most men it would have been very puzzling how a man should forget the time of day at which he had committed a murder.

But to Thad the matter was clear enough.

He knew that the fellow had had no more to do with the murder than he himself.

At least such was his belief at the moment.

The only question that bothered him in the least was what Chester had paid him the money for, that is, supposing he had done so.

He therefore pretended not to notice the fellow's blunder, and continued:

"What was the amount that Chester gave you and your pal for the job?" he asked.

"Fifty apiece," was the prompt reply.

"Don't you think that rather cheap for taking a human life?"

"Tis rather cheapish," admitted the ruffian, "and I told him so at the time; but he said that was the best he could do, so what was we to do but to take it?"

"Didn't it occur to you that you might be hanged for the crime?"

"Nope."

"Why?"

"It's always easy 'nuff to prove dat ye wasn't in a hundred mile o' de place at de time."

"So you expect to prove an *alibi*, do you?"

"Shure."

"What was your motive in coming here and confessing the crime?"

This was a sticker.

He had evidently not expected this.

He stammered and hesitated, and finally managed to get out in broken accents:

"I had to."

"Do you mean to tell me that that deformed little fellow compelled you to come with him?"

"Certain. Ye see he got de grips onto me afore I knows it, while I was asleep."

"How does that accord with Voque's story about compelling you to get up and dress yourself? Can you mean to tell me that you could do that with your hands tied behind your back?"

This was another surprise for the fellow.

If he had been coached to tell the story which he had just related, as Thad fully believed, his coacher had overlooked a very important point.

The fellow made no attempt to answer this question, but hung his head and remained silent.

"Now, tell me, Sliney," resumed the detective, "was not the fifty dollars which you received from Chester paid to you in consideration of your confessing to a crime which you never committed, for the purpose of shielding the real criminal, rather than for committing the deed?"

The prisoner was still silent, and became greatly confused at this question.

"Am I not right?" Thad repeated.

"No," was the faltering reply.

"Very well. You may not be aware that my report of your confession will stand against all the proof you can bring of an *alibi*."

To the detective's surprise this announcement had no apparent effect upon the ruffian.

"Come," continued Thad, rising, "I take you down now."

Without the slightest hesitation the fellow arose and went along with the detective.

When he arrived at Police Headquarters with his prisoner he ordered him locked in a cell to himself, and requested that he be allowed to see or communicate with no one.

He then returned to his own apartments on West Thirteenth street, where, to his surprise and chagrin, he found Voque waiting for him.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.

"WELL?" said Thad, in a not very good humor, "what do you want?"

"Nothing—that is, if I may be allowed—except to ask you if Buck confessed all right?"

"Yes, he confessed sufficient to hang him, I guess. And there may be some others who will get into trouble before this matter is through with."

As he said this he looked hard at the little man to note the effect, but there appeared to be none.

He was silent a moment, and then said:

"So you think there is a chance—that is—a chance of Buck's hanging, do you, sir?"

"Very good chance indeed," replied Thad.

"I'm glad of that."

"Why?"

"Because—because he's guilty of the crime, and then he's a bad man anyway."

"Then you really think he is guilty, do you?"

"Certainly."

"Look here, Voque, don't you know that it is useless for you to lie to me?"

"Eh?"

The little man was impressed this time without a doubt.

His face, as Thad saw it by the flickering electric street-lamp, presented a picture of grave apprehension and fear.

It was deathly pale.

"What do you mean?" he gasped at last.

"I mean that that fellow is no more guilty of that crime than you are, not as much, probably."

The little fellow shuddered.

"What was he doing with the letter?"

"I do not know that he ever had that letter in his possession."

"Didn't he confess to having had it?"

"Yes. And he also confessed to a good many things which I know to be untrue."

"How do you know?"

This was said with a show of bluster that indicated to the detective how desperately the fellow was struggling against Thad's will-power which was slowly but surely crushing him.

"How do I know? I know by their unreasonableness in some instances, by their manifest untruthfulness in others."

"What, for instance, was untruthful?"

"Well, that he had committed the murder, for one."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he did not even know when it was committed, day or night."

Voque's jaw dropped.

"A little point that you, or whoever it was that coached him, overlooked," continued Thad. "And yet when you think of it, a very essential point; don't you think so?"

Voque looked troubled.

There seemed to be a struggle going on within him as to whether he would give up the fight or attempt to continue it.

The latter appeared to prevail, for after a little while he went on:

"I don't see why you should suspect that either I or anybody else told the fellow what to say. There could be but one motive in such a scheme, gain; and it would be hard to get any one to pose as the guilty party unless he was pretty sure of getting off."

"So far as thinking any one coached him, that goes without saying. His accuracy in some things and utter ignorance of others connected with the case, prove that beyond doubt. And as for his being willing to place himself in the position of a murderer, with the chance of swinging, for the sake of gain, there is nothing strange about that. Men of his type thrive by such means. And this fellow had the impudence to tell me that he expected to prove an *alibi*."

"He did?"

This was asked with an expression and tone of alarm and disgust.

It was like that of one criminal when he learns that another has peached on him.

"Yes," replied the detective.

"The idiot!"

Thad could not avoid laughing.

Voque's consternation told more than he could have done, if his intention had been to confess the whole plot.

"Well, I'll have to leave you Voque," remarked the detective. "It is very late, and I have work to do to-morrow. Besides, I believe there is nothing else I desire to say to you."

With that he started to enter his door.

Voque ran after him.

"One thing more, please," he cried.

"What is it?" demanded the detective rather indignantly.

"Don't I get anything?"

"What for?"

"Bringing in the prisoner."

"When he is proven guilty, if that ever occurs."

"But—that is—"

"Are you short of money?"

"Yes, sir, I haven't a copper. I spent what little I had in getting on the good side of the bartender, and I have no place to sleep."

Whether the fellow was guilty of trying to perpetrate a fraud upon him or not, Thad could not help pitying him.

And yet he disliked to have the little rascal think he could play upon him.

For that reason he hesitated.

Finally he said:

"Look here, Voque. I believe you are trying to play a trick on me, and for that reason I shall give you nothing for what you have done to-day and to-night. However, if you will promise to do something for me, which I desire done, I will give you some money."

"What is it?" asked the dwarf, eagerly.

"Do you not think you can find out where Chester lives?"

"I think so."

"Very well. Here are a couple of dollars," said Thad, handing him the money. "That will tide you over the night. Bring me the address of Chester to-morrow, and I will add another ten."

"Oh, thank you!" cried the fellow, rapturously. "This will be ample for the present, and I will bring you the address by ten in the morning, if it is possible to obtain it."

"All right. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

And the little fellow went off whistling as merrily as though he had received a couple of thousand instead of two dollars.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour at which Thad retired, he was up and had his breakfast at an early hour.

He had returned to his "studio," as he called his apartments, and was attending to some correspondence, when he heard a rap on the door.

On opening it he found the quaint little chap, Namby Voque, standing there, dancing about and grinning as upon the occasion of their first meeting.

"Well, have you brought me the address?" demanded Thad, at once.

"Yes, sir—that is—yes."

"Very well; let me have it."

The dwarf gave him a slip of paper upon which was written, in a bold and rather elegant hand, the name and address of Harold Chester.

There were two things that struck the detective as soon as he looked at the paper.

First, the elegance of the handwriting; and second, the fact that the signature was a little different from the rest.

That is, there was an individuality about the signature that seemed to mark it as some one's own.

In other words, it appeared to be, and nine people out of ten would have declared that it was, the signature of the man that wrote it.

"Where did you get this?" asked Thad.

"You couldn't guess in a week," replied the dwarf, dancing about and grinning.

"I think I can," said Thad.

"Who?"

"Chester, himself."

"Wrong."

"Who, then?"

"Julio Lavardo."

"The murdered artist's brother-in-law?"

"Yes."

"How did you happen to go to him?"

"I didn't go to him, he came to me."

"Came to you?"

"Yes. Listen, and I'll tell you how it was. I first looked at the Directory—"

"And didn't find the address," interrupted Thad. "I could have told you that to start with. I tried to find it myself, and failed."

"That is strange, isn't it?" said Voque.

"Rather strange, yes, if Chester is an honest man."

"Well, not finding it in the Directory," continued the dwarf, "I went to several persons whom I thought might know; but to no purpose. I was on the point of despair, when I accidentally ran across Lavardo."

"On the street?"

"Yes, on Broadway. And as soon as I asked him if he knew Chester's address, he said he did, and taking out a note-book wrote it for me."

Thad was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"I suppose there is no doubt about the correctness of this address."

"Not the slightest," rejoined the dwarf.

"How do you know?"

"Because I took the trouble of going to the address for the purpose of verifying it."

"Well?"

"The name of Harold Chester was on the door-plate."

"That ought to be sufficient evidence," said Thad, half musingly; "and yet it seems strange that a prominent man, living on Lexington avenue, should not have his name and address in the Directory."

"It might be an accident."

"It might, but it is hardly likely. One would not be surprised if the name of Tim Dolan, living in a swarming tenement, should be left out; but I cannot see why the name of a man like this, rich, and living in such a location, should be omitted. Well," he continued, after a pause, "I am well enough satisfied of the correctness of the address to give you the money. So here it is," he said, handing the dwarf a ten-dollar bill. "Of course, if you have deceived me, I shall soon know it, and it will go hard with you."

"Oh, I have no fears, sir," cried the little fellow, dancing and grinning more than ever, because I know you will find it all right. And I thank you very much for the money."

"That's all right. And if Sliney should happen to turn out to be guilty, you will be well paid for capturing him."

"Oh, thank you a thousand times," cried the dwarf in raptures.

And catching the detective's hand, before the latter was aware of what he was about to do, he kissed it.

Thad shuddered.

The fellow's lips were as cold as those of a snake, and their contact sent a chill through him.

He then darted away.

Thad's first move was to visit the studio of the dead artist.

As soon as he got there he went to the desk where the artist had kept his papers, and looked up the letter from Chester.

When this was found Thad spread it out upon the table and putting the slip of paper given him by Voque beside it, compared the signatures.

At the end of five minutes' careful examination and comparison, he arose from the desk with the remark:

"There can be no doubt about it. They were both written by the same hand!"

As he folded the two papers and put them into his pocket he continued to muse:

"The puzzling part of it is where the cunning little rascal got the slip of paper, and why he told me that Julio Lavardo wrote it. There is something mysterious about that dwarf, and I have got to watch him."

Just at this time there came a timid rap at the studio door.

Upon opening it he found Miss Carbonetti there.

"I thought I wouldn't take you by surprise this time by coming in the back way," she remarked, smiling.

"I should have been none the less pleased to see you," returned Thad, "for I want to ask you a question or two."

"And I want to ask you one," she said, entering the room.

"Then let us have yours first."

"I want to ask you whether you have found any trace of Miss Petero."

"None whatever. In fact, I have not had time thus far. You must remember that it was only last night that I first heard about her."

"Sure enough, although it seems weeks, I am so anxious to know what became of her. I should like to ask you if you will let me know as soon as you learn anything?"

"I certainly will, with pleasure."

"And now for your questions, Mr. Burr."

"I want to know whether you ever saw a man named Julio Lavardo."

"The artist's brother-in-law?" she cried. "Oh, yes, frequently."

"What terms were he and the artist on?"

"Very good, I believe."

"You are not sure?"

"All I know about it is, that they always appeared glad to see each other, and I never heard Mr. Gazippe say anything against him."

"They never quarreled?"

"I think not. They always conversed in Italian as he and Chester did, but you can generally tell whether people are quarreling or not by their tone and gestures."

"Not always," replied Thad, laughing. "I have often watched two demonstrative Germans for half an hour, expecting to see them commence fighting, and would discover at last that they were telling each other funny stories."

"I have had similar experiences with the Italians," she said; "but I am positive that if there had been any ill-feeling between these gentlemen the artist would have spoken of it some time or other."

"What puzzles me," continued the detective, "and I don't mind telling you, inasmuch as you may be able to throw a little light upon the subject, is this: This fellow Voque agreed to procure the address of Chester for me. He did so, and when he brought it, it struck me that I had seen the handwriting before, and when I compared it with a letter I found here from Chester the signatures were identical."

"Perhaps Chester wrote it," suggested Miss Carbonetti.

"That is what I am inclined to think; and yet Voque claims to have got it from Julio Lavardo," replied Thad.

"Will you let me see the address?" she asked.

"Certainly," he said, handing it to her.

She examined it critically for awhile, and then returning it to him, remarked carelessly, Thad imagined:

"That is Lavardo's handwriting."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, I am very familiar with his writing, and cannot be mistaken."

"How do you account for the fact, then, that the signature in here is precisely like the one written by Chester himself?"

There was a strange, almost frightened expression came into her face, but she did not reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES.

"So this is the easy case that the inspector was talking about," mused the detective, as he left the studio of the artist to return to his own "studio." "I should really like to know what he would call a complicated case. However, I am aware that, taking the report of the police for it, he really could form no estimate of what it was."

Having learned, by reference to the Directory, the address of Julio Lavardo, and that that gentleman was in the real estate business, Thad made himself up as a dashing young man of means with the view of calling upon him under the pretense of wanting to buy land.

As soon as he was made up to suit his own fancy, the detective took a cab and had himself driven to East Twentieth street where, the Directory said, Lavardo resided.

He had no trouble in finding the house, and discovered that Lavardo lived in a flat on the first floor, where he also had his office.

A profusion of "To Let" and "For Sale" cards announced the business followed by Lavardo.

A ring at the bell caused the door to open, and the detective walked into the hall. And a rap on the first door he came to brought a fluff-haired little girl of about ten.

"Is Mr. Lavardo in?" asked Thad.

"No, sir," replied the little girl.

Thad could not help but remark the peculiar, yet striking appearance of the child.

She was not exactly pretty, and yet attractive; so much so, that not one person in ten would pass her without taking a second look at her.

Her complexion was almost colorless, and of that waxy appearance that we sometimes see in great beauties; and while her eyes were as black as night, her hair was light, almost flaxen.

Naturally supposing that she was the daughter of Lavardo, the detective asked:

"When will your papa be in, little girl?"

"He's not my papa," she explained, promptly.

"I'll ask mamma, though. Come in."

And without another word the child darted off.

Thad entered the room, which was an office.

A moment later a matronly looking lady came in.

She was a woman a little past thirty, perhaps, and had been strikingly handsome at one time, but had a worn look in her face that indicated sadness and care.

"Mr. Lavardo has not been at home for two days," said she, as soon as she entered the room.

Thad noticed that she spoke with a very slight Italian accent, but she had the bearing of a well-bred and educated woman.

"Have you any idea when he will return?" asked the detective.

"No, sir. He never tells me much about his business. He frequently goes away for a week

at a time, and we know nothing about him until he returns. Was there anything special about which you desired to see him?"

"Yes, but I must see him in person."

They were both silent for a few moments.

During which Thad's mind was busy with speculation.

What were the relations of this woman and Lavardo? he wondered.

Hardly that of husband and wife, else she would certainly have evinced more anxiety about his unaccountable absence.

"Pardon me, madam," he continued at last, "but is Mr. Lavardo your husband? You will excuse the question, I am sure, when I tell you that I have an object in desiring to know."

"Certainly," she replied in a gentle voice. "There is no offense in asking. No, sir, he is not my husband. He is my brother."

Was it possible!

Then she must be Gazippe's wife!

The very person, above all others, except Chester and Lavardo, that he wanted to see.

"You are not," he faltered, "the widow of the late Vincenzo Gazippe?"

A quick, apprehensive glance of the child toward her mother told the detective that he had guessed correctly.

"Unfortunately, yes," came the mother's reply.

There was a cold, passionless ring to the words that indicated an entire absence of sympathy, and told volumes.

"You were separated from him at the time of the tragedy, I believe?"

"Yes. But this is a matter upon which I do not care to speak, especially with strangers," she announced in icy tones, "and you will therefore excuse me if I decline to answer any more questions, touching the subject."

"Certainly, with pleasure," rejoined Thad politely. "But possibly you would not object to answering this question."

"Well?"

"Were there any serious differences between your brother and your late husband?"

"That I also decline to answer."

"Very well, ma'am," returned Thad. "I shall not insist. It may be as well to inform you, however, that I am a detective, and that it may be to your advantage to give me whatever information you may possess, thus saving yourself the mortification of being dragged into court and undergoing a rigid cross-examination by a lawyer whom you will find has less human feeling than myself."

She looked extremely troubled, but made no reply just then.

How forcibly did Scovello's words about his people's peculiarity in refusing to testify against even an enemy come to him at this moment.

"You refuse to give any information, do you, madam?" he said at length.

"Yes," tartly.

"Very well."

There was a cold determination about the way he said this that appeared to disturb her.

"The fact is," she added, "that I know nothing that would be of any value to you anyway, and until I am compelled I shall refuse to discuss a subject which is extremely distressing to me."

"I shall not insist," repeated the detective. "I am human enough to respect your feelings in the matter, and if you get into trouble, as you may, a call upon this person," handing her his card, "will always find you a friend."

"Thank you," she said, in a gentle tone, taking the card.

An idea occurred to Thad at this juncture.

He pulled out the letter written by Chester to the artist, and covering the autograph, asked:

"Do you know that writing, madam?"

She gazed at it intently for a moment, but before she had time to reply, the little girl, who was looking over her mother's shoulder, said something in Italian, in which Thad caught the single word or name, "Julio."

"Yes," responded the woman, as though she took it for granted that the detective understood what the child had said, "that is your uncle Julio's writing."

And then, before Thad could anticipate her movement, she took the letter from his hand and opened it so that she could see the signature.

At sight of it she turned as pale as a ghost, and became terribly agitated.

This soon passed, however, and she became calm and cold as before.

Handing the letter back, she repeated:

"Yes, that is Mr. Lavardo's writing."

"Perhaps you can explain, then, madam, how it comes to have Harold Chester's autograph attached to it?"

"No, sir, I cannot," she replied in a firm, dignified voice, which the detective could easily see cost her a heroic effort to maintain.

"Do you happen to know Mr. Chester?" he asked.

"I do not," she replied bluntly.

"You have doubtless heard of him through either your late husband or your brother?"

She arose from her seat with a majestic air at this question.

There was a strange, subtle light in her black

eyes, indicative that the fire of her race had been kindled by what she considered his impertinence.

"As I remarked before," she said in a low, rasping tone, "I do not care to be questioned by you, sir; and if you have no further business with me I shall have to ask you to excuse me. Good-day."

And she swept out of the room.

The little girl remained to show him to the door.

She, too, had assumed a grave and repellent demeanor, and Thad could not help noticing the change which had come over the childish features.

A few moments before they had been the embodiment of childish innocence and candor.

Now they were the features of a hardened cynic.

At the door the detective turned, and smiling gently at the child, extended his hand.

She drew back and scowled darkly.

Instantly putting his hand into his pocket, he drew out a bright silver half-dollar and held it into the palm of his hand toward her.

Quick as thought she snatched the coin, and holding the door a little wider, hurled it to the floor outside the door with all the vehemence she could summon, and shut the door in his face.

This action was so unexpected that the detective could hardly realize what had happened for a moment, so astounded was he; and when, a little later, he came to a realization of the whole scene that had just passed, he could not help laughing.

There was something approaching so nearly, and yet missing, the sublime in the little girl's scorn that it was highly amusing.

"Her mother's spirit over again, if I may be allowed—" came the discordant, rasping voice that the detective had learned to know so well and detest so heartily.

And turning, he found the grinning, dancing dwarf, Namby Voque, not four feet away.

The sight of the little rascal had become repugnant to Thad at any time, and now, when it appeared as if he must be following him, it made him angry.

"She's a lively one, eh?" continued the dwarf, still dancing and grinning.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Thad, paying no attention to the other's remark.

"Nothing in particular," returned Voque, without appearing to notice the detective's displeasure, "that is—nothing."

"What do you mean by following me then, you misshapen little rascal?" roared Thad.

"Following you?"

The dwarf ceased dancing and assumed a defiant attitude and an expression of injured innocence.

"Yes, following me," repeated the detective.

"Well, I like that—that is—I like your cheek," uttered the dwarf.

"Do you deny it?"

"Certainly I do. I never saw you before in my life, and I'd like to know how and why I should follow you."

Thad was about to denounce him as an unconscionable liar, when an idea occurred to him.

The dwarf had told nothing but the truth, evidently.

The detective had forgotten that he was disguised in such a way that his own wife would not have known him.

And of course the dwarf was justified in saying that he had never seen him before.

The thought brought a smile to the detective's face, and by way of covering up what he had said, he turned to the dwarf with:

"Pardon me, young man. Come to think of it, I guess you are right. You never have seen me before."

And turning upon his heel, he strode on.

As he left the dwarf, the latter said:

"Of course I never saw you before—that is—I never did."

But as the detective was about to close the street door, a mild, derisive laugh broke upon his ear that disturbed him.

What could be the meaning of it?

Was it possible that the cunning little rogue did recognize him after all?

And if so, what could be his motive, first, for following him, and second, for pretending not to know him?

While these puzzling questions were agitating his mind, the detective was making his way leisurely toward the residence of Harold Chester, on Lexington avenue.

It was some time after noon when he arrived at the house, and he was impressed with the fact that the blinds were closed as though the family might be absent.

The house was one of the best on the avenue, and there was a general air of sumptuousness and refinement about the place.

A ring at the bell brought a liveried lackey to the door, to whom the detective gave a card bearing the legend in script—

"MR. DOMINICK ARNOLD."

"Give that to your master," said Thad, in the most approved dadish drawl.

"E's not at 'ome," replied the English flunky. "Very well, then give it to your mistress," rejoined Thad, carelessly.

The servant opened the door for him to enter, and when he had taken his seat upon an elegant hall-settee, left the detective and went up-stairs.

In a short time he returned with the information that the missus would be down in a few minutes and the invitation for him to take a seat in the drawing-room.

Thad took a seat in the drawing-room, and was deeply impressed no less with the artistic taste displayed in the furnishing and decoration of the immense room, than with the evident lavish expenditure of wealth in that direction.

Evidently the master of such a place must possess unlimited wealth.

While the detective was admiring the rich furniture, costly hangings, luxurious tapestry and priceless paintings, and was completely oblivious to his own existence in their contemplation, he suddenly became aware of the presence of someone else in the room.

How long the person had been there, he could not tell. For aught he knew she had been there when he came in, but so quiet had she remained that he might never have noticed her presence, but for one incident.

As his eyes ranged around the room from one picture to another, they finally lighted upon one, a nymph, in whose features he at once discerned the lineaments of Sylvia Carbonetti. He at once rose and approached the picture.

As he did so, he came very nearly running against a large cushioned chair in which he noticed that some one was sitting. He could not see the face at first, as it was partially concealed in the drapery worn by the person, who was apparently asleep. But when he came near the chair the head arose, and the face came into a brilliant ray of light falling across the chair.

The detective at once recognized the features.

It was the little lady from whose ear the diamond ear-drop had been torn—Bianca Petero!

CHAPTER IX.

A HORNETS' NEST.

To say that Thad was astonished at finding the little lady is to put it mildly.

He was not only astonished, but delighted, that he should have been so fortunate as to discover the owner of the jewel.

For in so doing it seemed to him that he had almost struck the key-note to the whole mystery surrounding the murder.

As soon as the little lady became aware of his presence, she evidently had known at first, she started violently, as if frightened.

The detective, noticing her embarrassment, drew back a few steps from her, and said:

"I beg your pardon, but this is Miss Petero, I believe."

To his surprise, instead of answering, she sprang up and ran out of the room like a frightened child.

Thad remembered then that Mrs. Carbonetti said that the little lady had eccentric spells at times.

He had taken note of her general appearance, in the short interval between his discovery of her and her flight.

As the Carbonettis had told him, she was rather good looking, although he would never have thought of calling her "miss" from her age, for she was evidently over forty.

But what struck him most forcibly was her petite stature.

He did not believe that Mrs. Carbonetti exaggerated in the least when she put the little lady's weight at ninety pounds.

Indeed, he had his doubts as to whether she would weigh as much as that.

As she ran away from him she resembled a child of eight or ten.

So absorbed was he in contemplating Miss Petero and her strange conduct, that all thoughts of the picture which had drawn him to that portion of the room were forgotten, and it also prevented him from noticing the entrance of another person, until a soft, musical voice addressed him:

"Is this Mr. Arnold?"

Thad felt a trifle awkward when he turned and met one of the most beautiful women he ever beheld, besides Sylvia Carbonetti, in his life.

His embarrassment was increased by the fact that she had caught him standing in the middle of the floor, gazing in the direction the little lady had gone.

He was at a loss to explain his attitude, and he did not attempt it.

Bowing politely he replied to her question:

"Dominick Arnold, at your service, madam. Mrs. Harold Chester, I presume?"

"The same," she replied. "Be seated."

As Thad resumed his seat she sunk upon an ottoman, and asked:

"To what am I indebted for this visit, Mr. Arnold?"

"Begging your pardon for the admission, Mrs. Chester," he said, "I in reality called to see your husband."

"Then," she uttered, coldly, "you are doomed

to disappointment. My husband is not at home."

"Have you any idea when he will be here?"

"Not the slightest," she replied colder than ever.

"Out of the city, perhaps?"

"That I cannot answer. He may or may not be."

Here is a strange state of affairs, thought the detective.

And it was the more remarkable on account of being identically like the case of Lavardo.

Surely he had got into a nest of queer men—men who kept their business to themselves.

The detective felt awkward.

It was a delicate subject to attempt to catechise her any further in this direction, for he remembered the conduct of the artist's widow under similar circumstances.

Another fact that struck him as remarkable, was that she did not evince interest enough in her husband's affairs to inquire the nature of the detective's business with him.

He was on the point of despairing of making any further progress, when the lady, evidently already weary of his presence, yawned and leaned her head upon her hand.

As the creamy little hand went up to the side of her head her ear-drop hung down over it, thus bringing out the jewel in bold relief.

Thad could not avoid noticing it.

His heart stood still for an instant.

It was the exact counterpart of the one he had found on the dais in the studio!

He could see but one of her ear-drops, of course, and he would have given worlds to see the other.

Was it the same, or was the one in the ear nearest him really the mate of the one in his pocket?

These reflections flashed through his mind in an instant, and they determined his course.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Chester," he began, "but I am struck with the novelty of the design of your ear-drops."

"Indeed?" she responded languidly.

"Not so much for their peculiarity, either," he continued.

"No?"

Was there no such thing, he thought, as inducing her to ask a question?

"The reason is that I once saw a jewel the exact image of yours."

"Yes?"

Thad began to grow nervous.

"It was found in a studio, where an artist had been killed," he went on.

"Indeed?"

"It was afterward discovered that the gem had belonged to a little lady by the name of Bianca Petero."

There, thought the detective, see how that shot will strike you.

He watched her face minutely.

Not a change of expression. Not a shadow of any kind.

Furies! He did not know what to make of it.

The fact that Miss Petero was under the same roof was sufficient evidence that she must not only know the lady herself, but also the accident just mentioned.

He had one more shot and he was determined to fire it at once, and if that did not have the desired effect, he must change his tactics.

"The strangest thing about the affair," he resumed, "was the fact that the ear-drop was brutally torn from the lady's ear, and that, too, by a tall, light-complexioned gentleman with blue eyes and amber mustache."

"Yes?" came the same monotonous, indifferent response.

"It is of no use," mused the detective. "I have got to come to the point."

Now for the test.

"Do you happen to know of any lady who has lost a jewel in such a manner, Mrs. Chester?" he asked.

"I do not," she replied, coldly.

"Perhaps you are acquainted with some one by the name of Bianca Petero?"

"I am not."

This was too much.

And yet, what was he to do? He could not contradict a lady in her own house.

He had but two more moves to make in his new tactics, and he was done.

The first one he made at once.

Drawing the letter, written by her husband, from his pocket, he held it toward her and said:

"Mrs. Chester, will you kindly examine that writing and tell me whether you recognize it or not?"

She took the letter languidly, and after glancing indifferently at the first page, and without taking the trouble to look at the signature, handed it back with the indifferent remark:

"Never saw it before."

The detective was almost nonplused.

Either she was extremely ignorant of everything pertaining to her husband, or else she was the most unconscionable liar he ever encountered.

His last move must now be made, but he had

little hope that it would avail him any more than the others had done.

"You will pardon my inquisitiveness, Mrs. Chester," he continued, "but will you please tell me the name of the little lady I met here before you came in?"

"Mrs. Flight, I believe they call her," replied the lady, lazily, arising from her seat. "Are there any more impertinent questions you wish to put to me, sir?"

This almost discouraged Thad, but he nerved himself and replied:

"Yes, one."

"Well?"

"Has she, to your knowledge, lost any jewelry—a diamond ear-drop similar to your own, for instance?"

The lady's expression of languor instantly changed to one of scorn and contempt.

"I am sorry to say," she said, "for your sake, that my knowledge, vast as it is, does not extend to the affairs of my servants."

With this she swept out of the room without another word, leaving the detective standing there in about as awkward a position as when she first found him.

This was the second time to-day that he had been left in that manner by women whom he had attempted to catechise.

And Thad began to think there must be something wrong about him.

He was on the point of leaving the room, when, to his surprise, the little lady came running in in the same childish manner as she had retreated when he first spoke to her.

Running up to Thad and placing her finger upon her lip as an indication of silence, she whispered:

"Have your eyes about you as you go out, for they have discovered that you are a detective, and have threatened your life."

"Who?"

"The folks," was the lucid reply.

"Supposing I am a detective, why do they wish to kill me?"

"Don't ask me," she said, looking about with a frightened expression.

"But you must know," insisted Thad.

"Whether I do or not makes no difference now. I have warned you and that is enough. And you had better waste no time in going."

"I do not fear them."

"I know you do not, and that is all the worse for yourself."

"Tell me," he said, "are you you not the lady that once went by the name of Bianca Petero?"

"Yes, yes," she replied nervously; "but go now. Your life is in danger. Every minute adds to your peril!"

"One moment," he said, as coolly as though nothing was out of the way. "You lost a diamond ear-drop, did you not?"

"Yes, but—"

"Do you know the man who tore it from your ear?"

"Yes, yes, but I cannot tell you now. Some other time. Please go."

"I will if you will promise me one thing."

"What is it? Quick!"

"There," he said, handing her his own card. "Take that, and if it is possible for you to get away without their knowledge, come there, and give me whatever information you possess, and I will restore your ear-drop to you."

"Very well, I will come the first opportunity I get," she answered, speaking very rapidly and nervously. "But do not tarry an instant longer."

"No, I will go now."

And he started for the door, while she started away in another direction.

He had tarried too long, however, for when within a yard of the door it flew open and a man stood before him with a revolver leveled at his, the detective's head.

Thad instinctively sprang back.

As he did so his hand went back for his own revolver.

But he did not get it.

A heavy blow on his arm from behind caused the limb to fall numb and impotent at his side.

He then realized that he was attacked from the rear as well as in front.

The detective was in a tight place.

And what was worse, he had not the use of his right arm.

Still he did not lose his self-possession.

His left hand was still uninjured, and he could use it as well as the right.

Quicker than lightning his left hand grasped the pistol which the right hand had failed to get hold of, and the next instant a sharp report rung through the magnificent apartments, quickly followed by a cry of pain, and the man in front of the detective sunk to the floor.

This availed him nothing, however.

The road was cleared in front, but the enemy was still in the rear.

He attempted to turn upon him.

But his action was too slow.

Before he could accomplish his aim a heavy blow on the head from the rear caused the detective to reel and grow dizzy.

Still he did not entirely lose consciousness, and by sheer force of will threw off the

lethargy which was gradually stealing over him, turned upon his adversary, and making a spring grasped him by the throat with his left hand.

So powerful had his naturally gigantic grip become under the pressure of despair, that the fellow sunk almost instantly to the floor.

The struggle would have soon ended in Thad's favor, but for the fact that, just as the two men fell to the floor, the detective felt a blow, followed by a keen pain in his side, and turning his eyes upward he beheld Mrs. Chester standing over him with a knife raised ready for another thrust!

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED DENOUEMENT.

CIRCUMSTANCES favored Thad in two directions in this crisis.

Underneath his outer clothing, next to his shirt, he wore a sheath-knife, so that he might not be disarmed in the case of extreme contingencies.

When the woman struck at him with her knife, therefore, the point of her blade came in contact with the scabbard of this sheath-knife and glanced off, merely inflicting a slight flesh-wound.

The other circumstance was, that at the very critical juncture at which he needed both hands, and had but one, which was occupied in choking the enemy into insensibility, he discovered that the fellow was already unconscious.

All this went through his mind like a flash.

And it was fortunate that it did.

For the woman had the blade raised for another and a deadlier thrust.

There was not the fraction of a second to lose. Releasing the fellow's throat, the detective threw himself upon his side in such a position as to allow him to use his only available arm to advantage, and prepared himself for her attack.

He had not long to wait.

The woman was wrought up to a frenzy of wild passion. She looked a very tigress, ready to leap, as she stood there with uplifted blade and flashing eyes, prepared to plunge the glittering steel to his heart.

Undaunted by the change in his position, she appeared to nerve herself for the blow.

The knife descended.

But it did no harm.

By a quick and dextrous movement, Thad grasped the slender wrist just at the moment when the knife was within an inch of his breast, and twisted it aside.

So violent and sudden was the action that it must have cost the woman a twinge of pain.

For, although she made no outcry or complaint, a cloud of intense anguish passed over her face, while the nerveless little hand relaxed and the knife fell to the floor.

Thad lost no time in regaining his feet now.

As he once more stood erect over the vicious little beauty, he discerned for the first time that she was an Italian.

No wonder she was hot-blooded.

No wonder she could use a knife.

She cast a hasty and scornful glance at his towering figure and hissed:

"You would not have done it if he had been here."

"Who?"

"My husband."

"Perhaps not. But why was he not here?"

The woman shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"I wish I could tell myself, not you," she replied. "These are no good," she went on, pointing to the two prostrate men. "If I had such as you—"

She paused, and to the detective's surprise, she stole a shy glance at him and blushed the least trifle.

He affected not to notice the action.

Indeed, he was afraid to construe it to mean anything but a new phase of treachery.

"Why did you want to kill me?" he asked.

She repeated the coquettish glance and blushed.

"Because—"

Here she broke out into a hysterical laugh.

"May I speak to you in private?" she implored.

"With pleasure," consented the detective, who was ever ready to brave any peril which was likely to afford a clue in the right direction.

The woman stepped to the door leading into the hall, and calling to a servant, gave some direction in Italian.

Thad knew from the fact that she pointed to the prostrate forms on the floor, that it was with regard to their removal.

She then turned to the detective and said:

"Now, signor, we will go."

With that she led the way into a private parlor back of the drawing-room.

The room was small, but elegantly and tastefully furnished, and adorned, like the *salon*, with exquisite works of art.

"Be seated," she said, in the peculiarly soft and musical voice which Thad had noticed on first meeting her.

He sat down upon an ottoman near him, and she, to his surprise, seated herself upon a low stool at his feet.

As she did so, she raised her dark eyes to his, and with a mischievous twinkle, asked:

"Did I hurt you?"

"When?" asked Thad.

"When I struck you with the stiletto."

"No."

"I am glad."

Here she looked at the floor, and Thad could see that a rosy tinge was again passing over her beautiful features.

"And yet I tried to kill you," she went on, half musingly.

"No doubt of it," he replied coldly.

"How was it?"

"Fortune favored me."

"Ah, me," she sighed. "I wish fortune would favor me."

"And I am very glad it did not."

"Why?"

"I would be a dead man."

She laughed.

It was a musical, girlish ripple, and Thad could have admired it if he had not known the character of the woman.

The detective was impatient to know why she had sought this private conference.

And as she appeared in nowise inclined to come to the subject, he reminded her.

"You desired to speak to me in private," he said. "Speak at once, for my time is precious."

"Men are always in such a hurry," was her only comment.

He attempted to rise.

She pushed him back gently.

As she turned the side of her face—it was the opposite side from the one he had first seen—he noticed that the ear-ring on that side was of a different pattern from the other.

"Stay!" she implored. "I will tell you at once."

She was silent a moment, and appeared to be absorbed in deep reflection.

"You asked me," she resumed at last, "why I wanted to kill you."

"Yes. Why?"

"I will tell you. You came to find my husband. I knew your object in wanting to find him. I knew that he was suspected of being Vincenzo Gazippe's murderer, and that you were a detective on his track."

"How did you know this?"

"By instinct."

"You are sure?"

"Sure."

"You were told by no one?"

"Certainly not."

"Well?"

"I told you that I did not know where my husband was. This was true. I did not. But wherever he is, he is innocent of the crime."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind how, I know."

"But your husband does not confide all his secrets to you. Might not he commit a crime without your knowledge?"

"Yes. But he did not commit this one."

"Then you know who did it?"

"Never mind. He did not."

"Will you not tell me who the murderer is?"

"No."

"And yet you know?"

"I did not say so."

"But you started to tell me why you wished to kill me. Was it simply because you suspected me of being a detective in the discharge of his duty?"

"Not entirely."

"What then?"

She was silent for some moments.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet and running to a side-board, took up a decanter and poured out a dark red liquid into a glass, and returning, held it toward the detective.

"Have a glass of claret, signor," she said.

"I thank you, no: I do not care to drink," he answered.

"You do not drink wine?"

"Sometimes, but I do not care for it now."

"You suspect that it is drugged. See!" and she drank the contents of the glass.

"Now shall I give you a glass?" she pleaded.

"No."

"Very well."

And she tossed the glass away and sat down.

"Please finish what you have to say," he implored, "for I must be off."

"Well, when I first saw you—"

Here she broke off, buried her face in her handkerchief, and began to weep.

Thad did not disturb her.

After a little while she raised her head.

"My husband," she resumed, "is never with me. I do not know where he is half the time. That he has attractions somewhere else, I do not doubt. I do not blame him, for he does not love me. There was one man whom I loved, but—"

She hesitated and became confused.

"You do not love your husband, then?"

"No. How can I?"

"And you did love the artist?"

She started as though she had been pricked with a pin.

"Why do you think so?"

"I do not think so. I only asked you."

"No. I hated him."

"Because he would not return your passion for him?"

She started again.

But she soon controlled her feelings.

"No. I never had any passion for him," she uttered, vehemently.

But her face gave the lie, in Thad's opinion, to her words.

"When I saw you, I hoped that you had—"

had—

"Who?"

"Come to see me," she faltered, "instead of my husband. Your practical talk, therefore, maddened me. I tried to fight against it, against my own feelings; but it was no use."

Thad began to see her drift, and became alarmed.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

She threw herself upon her knees in front of him.

"That I love you!" she cried.

Thad was disgusted.

"This is nonsense," he exclaimed. "Get up, madam. Remember you are a married woman, and that I am a married man!"

"I care not, I love you!" she repeated passionately. "Do not, I beg of you upon my knees, do not repel me! I shall never see my husband again. I know I shall not. He is either in prison or has taken his own life, and you are the only man in the wide world that I love!"

The situation was becoming serious. Thad did not know what to do.

He dreaded the consequences of attempting to run away from her, and he was at a loss what to say to conciliate her.

While he was considering what was best to be done, she continued:

"You see this fine house, all this rich furniture? It is all mine. He has not a dollar in the world. I have millions. You shall have it all. You shall not want for anything. I love you, because you are brave. You are a giant. You would not run when my maid, at my suggestion, implied you to. You defeated two of the noblest of my race, and I love and worship you. Will you be mine?"

"No," returned the detective, coldly.

"You will not?"

"No."

"I will do even more."

"Well?"

"I will help you to accomplish the object for which you came here."

"To find your husband?"

"No, for that would do you no good, as he is innocent."

"What then?"

"Tell you who the murderer is."

"Then you know?"

"I do."

"And you will tell me?"

"Yes, if you will be mine."

Thad was silent.

Not for the purpose of considering whether he would accede to her proposition. He never had a thought in that direction. But how he should get out of his present situation with the least trouble.

Finally he hit upon a happy solution to the problem.

He would put her off.

"Your proposition," he said, in a gentle voice, "is most flattering to me, madam; but you must admit that it is sudden, and to me unexpected. Will you not give me a day or two to reflect?"

"No, no, I cannot," she cried, passionately.

"A day, then."

"No, not an hour, not a minute. You must not quit my sight until you have pledged your honor to be mine forever. Once out of my sight you will forget or despise me."

"You will not trust me, then?"

"No, do not ask me to!"

This was a happy thought on Thad's part.

"Then, how can you expect me to trust you," he said, in well-simulated tones of injured honor. "How do I know that your pretended affection is not all a snare to lure me to death and destruction? You have attempted my life once; how do I know that you will not repeat it?"

Her only reply was to spring to her feet and throw herself into his arms.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that he was entirely unprepared for it.

As soon as he could collect himself, however, he disengaged her arms from about his neck as gently as he could, for she clung like death, pushed her from him, and rose to his feet.

He could no longer control his feelings.

His manhood rebelled against this vile woman's advances—this murderess, as he believed her to be.

"This has gone far enough!" he declared. "It must stop!"

The woman had undergone a complete change. From the pleading, confiding, passionate creature of a moment before, she had metamorphosed into a very Lady Macbeth.

Her eyes flashed with all the venom inherent in her hot Southern blood.

He started to walk out of the room.

Instantly she sprang in his path, lifted her white hand in which glittered a knife, and cried:

"Never!"

The detective regarded her an instant, and then with an adroit movement, grasped the slender wrist, hurled the woman aside and strode from the room and out of the house.

As he passed out of the door into the street, the first person his eyes fell upon was Namby Voque, dancing and grinning as usual.

CHAPTER XI.

AN APPARITION.

THAD'S first impulse upon seeing Voque, as he believed, dogging his footsteps, was to turn upon him and censure him severely.

But on second thought, he concluded to do nothing of the kind.

For he was not sure that the dwarf had recognized him on the previous occasion.

Therefore he decided to walk indifferently past without appearing to notice him.

This he started to do, but the dwarf wouldn't have it that way.

He did not propose to be snubbed.

Jumping in front of the detective and looking up into his face with his usual grin, the little fellow, to Thad's surprise, said:

"How did you come out?"

Thad turned as scornful a look as he could muster up upon the little rascal.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"The lady—that is—Lucretia."

Still affecting not to understand, Thad asserted:

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"No? That's funny!"

And the fellow went off in a rollicking fit of laughter.

This nettled the detective.

He had come to detest the dwarf so much that the sight of him gave him that unpleasant creeping of the flesh that the sight of a toad does some people, and his voice, discordant and rasping, especially his laugh, drove the detective to the verge of desperation.

He was on the point of kicking him on this occasion, but he restrained himself and started to pass on, when the dwarf blurted out:

"She was onto you, old fellow—that is—saw through your disguise."

A horrible apprehension occurred to Thad.

What if this fellow was dogging his footsteps for the purpose of betraying his identity wherever he went?

It was not impossible.

Indeed, it would be in keeping with the fellow's character, and his recurrent presence bore out the theory in an eminent degree.

If such was the case, the detective was determined to know it and have an end of it at once.

Turning upon the dwarf, he said:

"Look here, Voque, do you know who I am?"

"Do I? Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the dwarf.

"Who am I?"

"Dominick Arnold," was the astonishing reply.

That told more than the detective could have pumped out of the dwarf in an hour's time.

Unless he had known all about what was going on in the house he could not possibly have known that Thad had represented himself as the individual mentioned.

Still he might know that and yet not know who he really was.

He determined to test that also.

"But you spoke of my disguise," he continued.

"If I am disguised I must be somebody else than what I appear. Who am I in reality?"

"Detective Burr," came the prompt reply.

"How do you know?"

"I have a way of finding out these things," rejoined the dwarf.

"But how?"

"It wouldn't do to tell."

"At all events you will tell this, if you do not wish to be locked up."

"What?"

"What your object is in dogging my steps and betraying me."

"I?"

Here he assumed an expression of injured innocence that was comical.

"Yes, you," ejaculated Thad savagely.

"You are mistaken."

"I am not. You followed me to the house of Julio Lavardo, and told them who I was, and now you have done the same thing here."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? How else could Mrs. Gazippe have known me, and I am positive she did from her conduct. And how else could Mrs. Chester have known me?"

"Saw through your disguise."

"That is nonsense."

"Why?"

"Because neither of them know me in my proper character, and even if they had seen through my disguise, which is not likely, they could not have guessed who I really was."

"You think not?"

"I know it."

"You don't know those women?"

"I know them well enough to know that they are not supernatural. I also know you, Namby Voque, for a treacherous rascal and liar, and if I catch you dogging my steps again, I shall lock you up."

Here Thad strode away and left the grinning dwarf.

When he was thirty yards away from the little fellow the detective's ears were once more greeted with the hateful discordant laugh.

He had it in mind to go back and arrest the little fellow, or else administer a sound drubbing to him, but scarcely had the idea crossed his mind when it vanished as quickly.

The dwarf asserted a strange influence over the detective.

The latter hated, detested, despised him, but when it came to the point of inflicting any punishment upon him, although he knew that he richly deserved it, his heart failed him.

It was six o'clock when Thad got down-town, and it just occurred to him that he had eaten nothing since breakfast.

So he stepped into a restaurant and got his dinner.

When he emerged from the restaurant it had grown dark and was raining.

The detective raised his umbrella and started for his apartments on foot, having but a few blocks to go, with his head down and his mind deeply engrossed in thought.

He gave little heed to his surroundings; but after he had turned into Thirteenth street his attention was attracted to a queer little figure wrapped in an immense waterproof cloak that touched the ground with each step, paddling along ahead of him.

At first he thought it was a little girl with a woman's cloak on, but the active way in which the little being hopped across gutters decided him that it was a boy. For some reason or other the detective became interested in the little creature, and he decided to watch where it went.

On it truckled, taking steps scarcely a foot long, but quick and nervous as those of a child.

Ever and anon it would stop and look up at the buildings, as though searching for a certain number.

Sometimes it appeared to be unable to discern the figures, and would run up the stoop of a house to ascertain. Then it would trot ahead again.

Again it would appear uncertain as to whether to continue or go back, and at such times Thad would stop and wait for it to make up its mind which way it would go.

Once or twice after looking at a number, the little creature would stop under a street lamp and examine a card which it held in its hand.

Block after block was gone over in this way, and finally the detective was nearing his abode.

The little pedestrian being ahead, arrived first, and to his surprise, went up the stoop.

He hurried on, and got there in time to see it ring his own bell.

"Who do you want to see?" he asked. "Nobody that concerns you," came a piping little voice that he recognized at once.

It was little Miss Petero.

He could not avoid laughing at her temper.

"Perhaps it is somebody that concerns me," he said, assuming the tone of voice he had used when acting the character of Dominick Arnold.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she cried. "I didn't know you when you first spoke."

"I am not surprised at that," he declared, putting his key into the lock and opening the door. "Come up."

The little lady followed him up-stairs and into his sitting-room without a word.

Nor did she utter a sentence until he had lighted the gas.

Then, seating herself upon a sofa, she said: "You are surprised to see me—are you not?"

"Yes; I did not expect you so soon," replied Thad. "Nevertheless, I am glad to see you."

"Thank you."

"Now, tell me," he went on; "how did Mrs. Chester discover my identity?"

"I do not know."

"Did not some one tell her?"

"Yes. At least, some one told the butler."

"But you do not know who it was?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know the dwarf that used to be employed by the artist? Nambly Voque, they call him."

"Yes, sir. I have seen him. He used to come up into Mrs. Carbonetti's while I was there to tell Miss Carbonetti to go down into the studio."

"Did you notice him about the Chester mansion to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Now, Miss Petero—I believe that is your name, is it not?"

"That was my maiden name."

"You have been married then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is your husband dead?"

"Yes, sir—he is dead—now."

There was something strange in the way she said this, that aroused Thad's curiosity.

What did she mean by saying that her husband was dead now?

"What name shall I call you now?" he finally asked.

"Miss Petero, if you please."

"Miss Petero, Mrs. Carbonetti told me your

sad experience at the time you were robbed of your ear-ring."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the little lady in surprise.

"So far as she knew it," he qualified. "The jewel was torn from your ear, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. See," she said, showing her ear, in the lobe of which was an ugly slit.

"I see," returned Thad after examining the ear. "You were in your right mind at the time the outrage was committed, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And saw the man?"

"As distinctly as I see you now. In fact, we had some talk before he tore my ear-ring out."

"Did you know him, or do you know him at present?"

"I did not know him then, but I know him now."

"Who is he?"

"Harold Chester."

"What was his motive?"

"He had none. He was incited, compelled to do it by his wife."

"And her reason was?"

"Revenge."

"What for?"

"That I cannot tell at present. At another time I will."

"I noticed that Mrs. Chester wore one ear-drop like yours, only one. Do you know where she obtained it, Miss Petero?"

"Her husband gave it to her."

"Was it the one that he tore from your ear?"

"Yes."

"What is her object in wearing the one ear-drop?"

"The same that induced her to compel her husband to tear it from my ear—revenge."

"You must have done her some terrible injury to incite such revenge."

"You shall judge as to that when you know the particulars."

"Where is the other ear-drop?" asked the detective.

"I do not know," she replied.

He took the jewel from his pocket and held it toward her.

"Does that look like it?" he asked.

The little lady became greatly agitated.

"Yes. Where did you get it?" she cried.

"In the studio."

"Whereabouts?"

"On the dais usually occupied by the model."

"Heavens!"

"What?"

She had turned very pale and trembled violently.

"When did you miss the jewel, Miss Petero?"

"On the very day of the murder."

"Then you think the murder was committed by—"

"Harold Chester. Yes, I know it."

"How do you know it?"

"I will tell you: Mrs. Chester was violently jealous of her husband. She used to have me dogging his footsteps to see whether he spoke to any other woman or not. On the day in question, she learned from some source or other that he was going to visit Gazippe's studio about noon, and she made me go down to watch him lest he should have something to say to the model. I got there a little late, however, and met him coming away. I did not go up-stairs, therefore, but sat down upon the stoop to rest. Pretty soon the dwarf came down and told me that the artist had been killed."

"Did you see anything of Lavardo at that time?"

The little lady gave him a strange, quizzical look and said:

"No."

"I notice that you wear mourning, Miss Petero. Who are you mourning for?"

"My husband."

"What was his name?"

She buried her face in her handkerchief a few moments, and finally facing the detective again she said:

"Vincenzo Gazippe!"

"The artist?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER XII.

NEW COMPLICATIONS.

THE announcement of the little lady that she was the wife of the murdered artist almost took the detective off his feet.

It was the greatest surprise he had had.

He was, therefore, silent and contemplative for a long time.

Finally he resumed:

"How long had you been separated from your husband at the time he was murdered?"

"Over five years—ever since he left the old country, in fact."

"Were you aware that he had another wife?"

"Yes, I discovered it as soon as I arrived, some six months ago."

"Did he marry her, or you first?"

"Myself."

"And he married her after coming to this country, you say?"

"Yes."

"Only five years ago?"

"About five years and a half."

"The other wife has a child ten years old. How do you account for that?"

"She was a widow when he married her."

"And the child was not Gazippe's?"

"Certainly not."

"It was on account of finding him with another wife that you left him, I presume?"

"Yes."

"You had just arrived at the time you fainted in the studio, and were carried into the flat of Mrs. Carbonetti, had you not?"

"Yes, I had just arrived; but I did not faint. I was—"

Here she paused.

"Well?"

"Well, I was not treated right," she continued.

"In other words, you were harshly treated."

"Yes."

"By whom? Your husband?"

"I cannot tell you just now."

"Chester, perhaps?"

She was silent.

Thad also became reflective.

After a time he continued.

"What position do you occupy in the Chester household, Miss Petero?"

"Lady's maid."

"To Mrs. Chester, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is strange that you should have taken a position in their house after the treatment you had received at their hands."

"Not when you know the facts."

"And the facts are?"

"A thing which I must keep secret for the present; to tell you that would be to tell you the cause of Lucretia's thirst for revenge."

"But do you not desire that your husband's murderer should be brought to justice?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then you should not object to telling all the facts in your possession."

"I do not hesitate to tell all the facts bearing on the case. But I cannot see how the particulars of my own private career should be of any value to you."

"They might clear up the whole mystery."

"But I know they would not; otherwise I should tell them at once."

"Very well, I shall not insist upon this," said Thad, in a kindly tone. "But tell me, do you know anything of the whereabouts of Chester?"

"I do not."

"How long since he was at home?"

"About three days, I should think."

"The very time," thought Thad, "that Voque claimed to have seen him in the saloon on Third avenue with the ruffians."

He must have settled his score with them, and fled the city.

But here he found himself reviving a theory which he had once abandoned—that of Chester having had the murder committed by hired assassins.

His interview with Buck Sliney had pretty well convinced him that that ruffian, at all events, was not the assassin.

And now came Miss Petero's statement to corroborate it.

This being the fact the whole story about seeing Chester in the saloon with the ruffians may have been an ingenious invention of the dwarf.

"You overheard nothing, I presume," he resumed, "that would lead you to infer that he had gone away, to a distant place, for instance?"

"Nothing."

"Is the madam not in the habit of discussing her husband's affairs?"

"No, sir. She scarcely ever mentions his name, and never discusses his movements in any way."

"Are they not in the habit, sometimes, of talking over their affairs?"

"They scarcely speak at all."

"He is away a good deal, I presume."

"Yes, sir, nearly all the time."

"Does she have male visitors?"

"Very rarely."

"Did you ever notice any undue familiarity between her and her gentlemen visitors?"

"Never. On the contrary she has always been noted for her coldness and severity of manners toward the gentlemen who called at the house."

"Wasn't she in love with Gazippe?" asked Thad, and watched the effect in the little lady's face.

It was striking and pitiful.

If at that moment he had been in the act of amputating one of her limbs, the woman could not have evinced any more real agony.

Her face underwent the most frightful and painful contortions, and finally settled down into a fixed expression of deep melancholy.

The face appeared to have grown ten years older.

He had evidently touched a very sensitive wound, and he almost regretted having asked the question, and would have sincerely regretted it had it not been for the fact that her anguish demonstrated the truth he was trying to get at, and which she refused to answer, namely, a cause for jealousy between the little lady and Mrs. Chester.

If Mrs. Chester, with the strong, uncon-

trollable passion which he knew her to possess, had taken a fancy to the artist, there was sufficient incentive for her to commit murder.

Had she not tried to murder him one minute, and make love to him the next, and when repulsed, tried a second time to murder him?

This was a real clue.

The detective was highly elated with his discovery, for after all the hard work devoted to this case, this was the first real clue he had struck.

In the mean time the little woman sat with her eyes bent upon the floor, and uttered no word of answer to his inquiry.

"Pardon me, Miss Petero," he said in a kindly voice, at last. "I did not intend to wound you. That is one of the unpleasant features of a detective's business, that he frequently has to tread upon sacred ground, to find the hiding-place of some villain. Let us forget that. Were you aware that this woman had declared her love for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you know it? Did she tell you?"

The expression of melancholy instantly gave place to one of extreme malignancy and hate at this question.

The expression appeared strangely out of keeping with the generally demure little creature, but it demonstrated the fact that she was a woman, with all a woman's feelings.

"I listened," she almost hissed.

"And heard it all?"

"Yes."

"What do you imagine could have been her motive? She could not have been sincere, of course."

"Sincere?"

This was said in a dreary sort of way, as though she did not quite comprehend the meaning of the term.

"Yes. She certainly did not mean what she professed?"

"I do not know. She may, or may not. She is a strange woman. But whatever she meant, your escape from her was the only way out of the difficulty."

"Why?"

"Why? Because, whether she means it or not, and no one can tell, not even herself, whether she does or not, she will go on and on, during you deeper and deeper into her snare, until she will land you where she did my poor, foolish—"

Here she checked herself suddenly, and clapped her little hand over her mouth, as though she were afraid to trust that member by itself.

She grew terribly confused, and finally settled down into her old look of melancholy.

She had not said it, but in conjunction with what she had intentionally or unintentionally revealed before, he had no difficulty in guessing who she meant.

"So you think she would be capable of doing me some dreadful injury if I did not allow her to have her own way—kill me, perhaps, as she did Gazippe?"

This he threw out as a feeler, and watched her countenance closely.

But to his surprise, instead of evincing any shock, she only looked astonished.

"What do you mean?" she asked finally.

"That this woman, through her jealousy, murdered, or incited the murder, of your husband."

"You are mistaken."

"How do you know?"

"Because Chester did it himself."

"Possibly he did; but as you say, he was incited or compelled to tear the ear-drop from your ear. Don't you think he might have been incited to the murder in the same way?"

"By no means. It was quite a different matter. She would never have had him killed, if she could have helped it."

"Then you think, perhaps, that he was jealous of the artist's attentions to his wife?"

"I do not think so."

"There must have been some cause, some good and sufficient reason for his action."

"So there was, as he looked at it."

"And will you not tell me what it was?"

"Not now. In a few days, maybe in a few hours, I may."

"You are waiting for something to develop then, I take it."

"Yes."

"And you will not reveal what it is?"

"I cannot. Do not ask me," she pleaded.

"You shall know all in due time—very soon—in a few hours, perhaps; but to tell you now would be to shatter what little hope I have for the future."

"Are you going to return to the Chester mansion to-night, Miss Petero?"

"Yes."

"Will not they suspect something wrong on account of your being out so late?"

"Oh, no, I am often out late. They would suspect something, though, if I should remain out all night, I have no doubt."

She was silent a moment, and busied herself with arranging her great cloak.

Finally she said:

"I will go now."

"Very well," replied Thad. "I thank you

very much for the information you have given, and trust that, as soon as circumstances will permit, you will give me the rest of it."

"I will," was the rejoinder. "Good-night."

"Good-night."

And she went out into the darkness (for the hall gas had been turned out,) and the detective stopped at the door to listen to her pattering little feet as she went down-stairs.

The echoes grew fainter and fainter, and finally died or became mingled with the hum of the street outside.

He heard the heavy street door open and slam to again, and he said to himself, "she is gone."

Still, for some reason, he did not quit the door immediately, but stood there thinking and peering into the darkness.

Finally he heard the street door open again and some one came in—some belated tenant of the building, perhaps, and as the great door swung open the detective could hear above the late-comer's footsteps, a rush of wind; a dismal, melancholy wail, as of some one in pain. Nor was this all he heard.

Above the hum of the street outside; above the footsteps of the late-comer; above the melancholy wail of the current of wind, and, in fact, borne in upon its tide, came the sound of voices.

And he recognized at least one of them.

It was that of little Miss Petero.

She was evidently in conversation with some one.

Who could it be?

Certainly not the janitor, for that exemplary individual had been in bed these two hours.

The detective's curiosity was aroused.

He must know whom the little lady was conversing with, and, if possible, the subject of their discourse.

Closing his door softly, Thad stepped quickly back to his secret elevator, the door of which was a secret panel. Touching a spring, the door opened and he stepped upon the elevator. A moment later he was in a tunnel that had its outlet in the area under the stoop.

It was but the work of a moment to traverse this tunnel and step out into the area.

As he did so he again heard the voices. There could be no mistake now. One of them was undoubtedly that of the little lady. But the other person spoke in so low a tone that he could not distinguish it.

Thad stepped to one side, so that the conversationalists came in full view of him.

Fortunately a ray of light from the street lamp fell across their faces.

He recognized the other speaker at once.

It was Namby Vogue, the dwarf!

CHAPTER XIII.

ONLY A PIECE OF BREAD.

OF all the surprises the detective had received in the course of this mysterious case, this was the worst.

He was not surprised to see Vogue here.

He had long since become reconciled to seeing the dwarf bob up on any and all occasions, and when least expected.

But what could there be between him and little Miss Petero?

She had professed a very slight acquaintance with him.

It looked like it.

And yet what could be her motive?

Vogue's motive was clear enough. He wanted money.

But what could she gain?

Why had she come all the way down to see him, at the risk of incurring the displeasure of that terrible woman, Mrs. Chester, unless she was in earnest?

These thoughts, and many more, rushed like a whirlwind through the detective's brain as he stood there watching the quaint little pair, and vainly endeavoring to catch some small fragment of their conversation.

They appeared to be speaking in a lower tone than before, for to save him he could not catch a syllable of what they said.

Then he moved up closer.

But just as he did so, he caught the words, spoken by Vogue:

"Then we'd better go to-night. We're not so apt to be detected as we would be in daylight."

And without another word they came down the steps and away.

Where could they be going?

It would never do to let them get beyond his range of vision, thought Thad.

He would follow them.

And he did.

Emerging from the area, the detective first assured himself of their whereabouts, and finding that they had gone toward Broadway, he crossed to the opposite side of the street and began the tedious ordeal of shadowing the little pair.

He had no difficulty in keeping them in view and himself in the shadow at the same time.

The little couple, wherever they were bound, appeared to be in no hurry, but pattered leisurely along, so that Thad had to walk much slower than was his wont in order not to overtake them.

Ten minutes' walk, even at their easy pace, brought them to Broadway.

Here they paused and looked up and down the street anxiously.

Did they contemplate taking a hack?

Thad had not long to speculate in this direction, for scarcely had the thought crossed his mind, when a car came along going down-town, and the two little creatures ran for it.

This would never do.

He must still follow, and yet it would not do to get on the same car.

Luckily there was a cab standing not far off. Running over to it he shoved a silver dollar into the drowsy driver's hand, and said:

"Do you see yon street car?"

"Yep," replied the caddy.

"Keep it in sight till I tell you to stop."

"All right. Git up."

A moment later the detective was bowling along after the street car and not ten feet behind it.

He knew that he incurred no risk of discovery, as it was difficult for those inside the car to see who was following; besides the little pair would not have the slightest suspicion that he was aware of their movements and at that moment following them.

On, on down Broadway moved the car with its usually slow progress, closely followed by the detective in the cab.

Never for an instant did his eye leave the retreating car, and especially sharp was his scrutiny whenever the car stopped to let off a passenger or let one get on.

At such times the cabman would pull up his horse and Thad would have an excellent opportunity of examining the faces of those who got off.

Never were passengers more closely scrutinized, although this was hardly necessary, inasmuch as he would have had no difficulty in recognizing the little people at a glance.

Still, he would run no chances, and kept up his rigorous vigil.

He could catch occasional glimpses of Vogue and the little lady inside the car as it would turn at the proper angle, and they appeared to be engrossed in continuous and deep conversation.

They evidently did not dream that they were being followed.

Once, however, it seemed as if the dwarf must have grown suspicious, for he came out upon the rear platform and looked about, and then went into the car again. But perhaps it was from a spirit of extreme caution, rather than apprehension, that caused him to do it.

Finally the car stopped at the junction of Franklin street and Broadway, and the detective's suspense was put to an end by seeing the little couple get off.

Thad was not long in dismounting also, and put after them.

They went east along Franklin street, and the detective, keeping on the opposite side of the street and in the shadow as much as possible, followed them.

He began to surmise now where they were going, and he was not mistaken.

A few minutes' walk brought them to the corner of Elm street, where the Tombs prison is located, and the two little creatures stopped to discuss something.

One appeared to want to go one way and the other another.

Finally, however, they appeared to agree upon the course they were to pursue and continued along Franklin street to the next corner, which is Centre street, then turning this corner followed along the Centre street side of the Tombs till they had nearly reached the Leonard street corner, just beyond the broad flight of stairs leading up to the great iron gates.

From the steps to the corner of the building on this side are a succession of small grates in the pavement and close to the wall of the prison.

These grates cover air-holes that furnish ventilation to the dismal cells below the ground.

The detective had approached as near as the steps and then stepping into the shadow, watched the little couple.

Starting from the steps the dwarf went slowly along the prison wall, evidently counting the grates, and when he had reached a certain spot, stopped upon one of the grates.

Then followed a good deal of discussion, the nature of which Thad could not understand from where he was concealed.

At the end of the talk the dwarf went back to the steps, and repeated the operation of counting the grates.

This brought him to the same grate again, and he appeared to be insisting that he was right; while the little woman seemed to doubt it.

Finally she went back to the steps and counted, and she also came to the same grate.

This appeared to satisfy her, and after some more discussion, the dwarf, after looking about and satisfying himself that no one was watching, got down, put his mouth to the grate and made a noise with his mouth similar to the squeak of a rat.

As soon as he had done this, he put his ear down to the grate and listened.

Whether he heard any response from below, or not, the detective could only surmise.

It was likely he did, for a moment later he arose, and turning to Miss Petero, put out his hand.

She, in turn, put her hand into her pocket and took out a small box therefrom, and opening the box she took out something that looked to Thad from where he stood, like a marble.

Whatever it was she handed it to the dwarf, and he again got down upon his knees.

Putting his mouth to the grate the dwarf repeated the noise which the detective had heard before, and followed it by putting his ear down again.

Having apparently satisfied himself that it was all right, he dropped the white ball, or marble, down through the grate.

Again the dwarf put his mouth to the grate and squeaked like a rat, and again put his ear down to listen.

He appeared to be satisfied with the result, for a moment later he arose, and the two little people hurried away.

Thad was in a quandary.

What move to make he hardly knew for a moment.

But his mind was soon made up.

The first thing to be done was to find out what the dwarf had thrown through the grate.

But how was this to be done?

Thad went to the grate where the dwarf and his little companion had just been, and examined it minutely, but discovered nothing about it to distinguish it from the others.

Indeed, he would have had some difficulty in locating it, had he not counted the grates with the dwarf, and remembered the number from the steps, which was thirteen.

He looked, or tried to look down through the grate, but it was dark down below.

There was but one thing to be done.

He must find the warden.

This necessitated a visit to the Franklin street entrance where one of the assistants always sits, day and night.

A ring at the bell brought the policeman on guard to the iron gate.

Thad lost no time in making himself known, and stating his business.

"I'll see what can be done in a few minutes," announced the guard. "It only wants five minutes to twelve, and then my relief comes on, and I'll go with you."

Those five minutes seemed an age to Thad.

But the time finally passed, the relief arrived, and the first guard whose name was Connors, announced his readiness to accompany the detective.

They first went around on the Centre street side of the prison, and Thad pointed out the particular grate.

"Lemme see," mused Connors, "that would be about 45."

The number mentioned meaning the number of the cell below, of course.

"Let's go inside," continued Connors.

And, leading the way, they returned to the Franklin street entrance and went in.

Thad followed the guard through a series of dimly lighted corridors, and they finally came to one which appeared to face the tier of cells along the eastern or Centre street side of the prison.

Following this for some distance, they came to cell No. 45, and Connors stopped and looked in.

From the light outside, a vague view of the cell's interior could be made out, and everything appeared as usual.

The dim outlines of some one reclining upon the rude couch could be seen, and from his heavy breathing he was to all appearances asleep.

"There don't appear to be anything wrong here," remarked Connors. "You must 'a' hit the wrong gratin', unless I've made a mistake."

With that he examined the cells on either side of 45, and found them also quiet.

"No, this must be it," he went on.

"Well, if you are sure about it," said Thad, "suppose we examine the cell. These fellows are good at playing 'possum at the proper time."

"All right," returned Connors.

And he unlocked the cell door.

Thad flashed his lantern inside.

There was no mistake.

It was the right cell, evidently, for there on the cot, apparently sound asleep, was Thad's old "friend," Buck Sliney.

At least so it seemed, although he could not have told whether it was Buck or the fellow that looked like him.

Thad did not stop to consider just then. In fact, so intent was he upon discovering what the dwarf had thrown into the cell, that he did not realize at that moment that he had arrested two men who might have been twins.

He did not disturb the sleeper, but flashing his light from one point to another, began a thorough search of the cell.

Every nook and corner was searched, under the cot and among the blankets covering the sleeper.

The prisoner appeared to be a sound sleeper, for, although Thad took off the blankets and shook them, and turned him over two or three times to see if there was anything under him, he did not wake.

But all his searching in this direction revealed nothing.

Thad next searched the fellow's clothing.

Not only did he turn every pocket inside out, but he examined the lining of every article for secret pockets.

But to no purpose. Nothing was found.

The prisoner's hat hung upon a nail, and that was taken down, the lining and band examined thoroughly, but with the same result.

At this juncture a happy thought occurred to the detective.

Calling the guard inside, he said:

"There is but one more place where I can imagine the fellow could have concealed the ball."

"Where's that?" asked Connors.

"In his mouth. That is why he is feigning sleep. We must get his mouth open."

"All right," said Connors; "you hold his hands and I'll soon have his yawp wide enough to take in a football."

Thad grasped the prisoner's hands and pinioned them to his sides. In the mean time Connors jammed his thumb into the corner of the fellow's mouth, back of his teeth, and pressed backward.

In an instant the mouth yawned like a crater.

Connors took up the lantern and threw the light into the prisoner's mouth, and then shook his head.

"There's nothing in there," he said.

Thad was at the end of his tether, and was a little despondent.

He took up the lantern and went around the cell again.

Then another idea struck him.

Placing the lantern within a few inches of the wall, he went around the cell, examining the seams between the stones forming the walls of the cell.

Beginning at the floor, he examined one seam at a time, until he reached a height corresponding to his own head.

Suddenly he stopped.

He had found something.

It was only a bit of moist bread crammed into the seam, but he could easily see that it had originally been in the shape of a ball.

He dug it out and broke it open.

Eureka!

It contained a bit of paper!

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW FRIEND.

"Is that all?" cried Connors, in disgust. "Sure, if I'd have known it was a piece of bread you was after, you could 'a' had that with less than half the trouble, and a whole loaf of it, for that matter."

The reason of this outburst was that he did not see what Thad had taken out of the pellet of bread.

"What are you goin' to prove by that?" he continued.

"That the prisoner eats bread," replied Thad, laughing.

"And ye'll identify by that, eh?"

"Sure."

"Well, then, ye may as well lock the entire town up," ejaculated the dull guard, as he locked the cell again.

"You don't mean to intimate that they all eat bread?" exclaimed the detective, with an expression of horror.

The policeman looked at Thad as though he wasn't quite certain whether he had got hold of a lunatic or an ordinary idiot.

But he made no reply, and led the way along the corridor to the Franklin street entrance.

Here Thad explained to him what he had really discovered, and then bade him good-night.

It was long after midnight when the detective got back to his lodgings, but he could not sleep until he first examined the paper he had discovered.

On opening it, however, he found it to simply contain a lot of figures.

But as this was an old style of cipher-writing, the detective was no more put out with it than if it had been English.

At least so he thought at the start.

Taking each figure as a representative of a letter in the alphabet of the same numerical order, he commenced the test of unraveling the enigma.

He got along pretty well till he had written out the first word, and found it to spell "Tutti."

That surprised him.

In the whole course of his life he had never run across a word like "tutti."

"What can it mean?" he mused.

Then all of a sudden the truth flashed upon him.

It was Italian.

"I will have to call upon my lawyer friend again," he reflected, "and have him render this into good common United States."

With that he went on to the next group of figures, and following the same method, soon spelled out a word.

But like the other, the word was perfectly unintelligible to him.

The second word was "buana."

"That may be good Italian," he mused; "but 'tutti buana' means no more to me than a Chinese tea label."

From that he went on, and in the course of half an hour he had the whole lot of figures rendered into words.

"Well," he said, as he reviewed his work, "who says I can't write Dago? The only question is whether any person can read it or not. I'll swear I can't."

"Maybe I can, sir."

If some one had fired a pistol off under Thad's nose he could not have jumped more violently.

He was not easily startled as a general thing, but this was so unexpected that even he lost for the instant control over his nerves.

Looking round he was as much surprised, although not so much startled, at the appearance of the speaker as he was at the voice.

It was the little girl whom he had seen at Julio Lavardo's, who rejected his half-dollar.

"Well, little girl," he said, "what are you doing here? Come to get the half-dollar you threw down yesterday?"

"No, sir, but I've come to ask your pardon for the way I acted and to ask you if you won't please help mamma and me."

"How help you; give you money?" asked Thad, surprised that the child should have been sent all the way there at that time of night to beg.

This was especially surprising inasmuch as they appeared to be well to do the day before.

"No, no," she answered, with something of the same scorn with which she had hurled the coin at his feet; "we want no money. We want you to protect us."

"From whom?"

"Some person that wants to kill us."

"Who are they?"

"I do not know. Two men and a woman. They sent mamma a letter, telling her that she must go, or they would kill her, and to-night they came."

"How did you find your way here?"

"Mamma had your card, which you gave her when you told her that when she wanted a friend to call on you."

"But how did you get in?"

"The street door was unlocked and this one was standing partly open. I saw the light inside and you sitting here writing, and you looked so good and kind that it seemed like an invitation to come in."

"So it was, little girl," exclaimed Thad graciously, "so it was an invitation. But where is your mother?"

"She has gone to a friend's house where she can stay for a day or two. She is sick, and as she will remain in bed most of the time our enemies will not be apt to find her; but they were afraid to keep me, for fear some one would see me, and then our friends would be killed too."

"Why didn't your mother notify the police?"

"It would do no good. Our enemies are the Mafia people."

"Does not your mother know who these people, the two men and woman, are?"

"I think she does; though she wouldn't tell me."

This was a strange story, if true.

But was it true?

Thad had serious doubts about it.

Since discovering the treachery of Namby Voque and little Miss Petero, he had little faith in the Italian race.

What treachery this apparently guileless child could be at the bottom of it was hard to imagine, and in his heart of hearts he could not believe she was guilty of any.

"Well, little girl," he responded at last, "you may remain here with me at present."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" she cried.

She was now the same gentle-faced creature that he had first seen.

"I am fond of little girls—good little girls. That was why I gave you the money yesterday, which you threw at my feet."

"Forgive me; I was naughty then."

"I knew you were, and it made me very sad to see it."

"Did it, sir?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, because I wanted to be your friend, and also make you my friend."

"I am very sorry. I am your friend."

"So am I yours, little girl."

"Oh, thank you, sir," she exclaimed, gratefully. "May I kiss you, sir?"

"With pleasure."

With that she walked up, and, putting her little arms about his neck, kissed him.

"What is your name, little girl?"

"Juliette," she replied.

"That is a very pretty name. Is your father dead, Juliette?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was his name?"

"Francis Arlington."

"Then you are not Italian?"

"No, sir."

"You said a moment ago that you could translate Italian."

"Yes, sir, I can read and speak the language."

"Your mamma taught you, I suppose?"

"No, sir, Mr. Gazippe taught me partly, and then I went to school in Italy."

"Ah, I see. After your mamma married Mr. Gazippe, he took you to Italy, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did your mamma leave Mr. Gazippe?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Was he unkind to you or your mamma?"

"No, sir, he was very good. I loved him so, so much. You look like him—just like him, and that is why I love you."

Thad still had on his disguise of the young Southern gentleman.

An idea occurred to him.

If it was really true that he resembled the artist in his present make-up, perhaps that was why Lucretia Chester had fallen in love with him.

So, little by little, the clue was formulating itself into a solid chain.

"You were sorry then, when Mr. Gazippe was killed were you not?"

"Yes, sir; so sorry. I cried all night, and mamma whipped me for it."

"She wasn't sorry, then?"

"No, sir, I think she was glad."

"Why?"

"She didn't love him."

"Is your mamma Italian?"

"No, sir."

"Well, Juliette, it is very late, and I presume you are sleepy. In the morning we will translate this thing I have written."

"Can't you translate it, sir?"

"No."

"Who wrote it?" she asked with wide eyes

"I did."

"And can't you translate it?"

"No, Juliette, I told you I couldn't."

The child laughed.

"That is funny. You don't look like an ignorant gentleman."

"What do you mean?"

"Papa—that is, Mr. Gazippe always said that anybody who could not read and write Italian was too ignorant to live."

"Then I am too ignorant to live, Juliette," said the detective, laughing, "for I can neither read, write nor speak it."

"That's too bad," she sighed.

"It is bad; but it can't be helped. Well, Juliette, do you want to go to bed?"

"I would rather translate that first," she replied.

"Very well, you may."

Without another word, she drew a chair up to the table and was soon busy with pencil and paper, rendering Thad's Italian into English.

She hadn't gone very far when the little head arose from the table, and she said:

"That word isn't spelled right, sir."

"I don't doubt that in the least," he replied.

"But you can make out what it is, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I can make out what it ought to be. It ought to be 'sanga,' blood, and you've got it 'tanga.'"

"What does that mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything."

"I see. Well, I suppose I counted wrong," said Thad. "Let me see," taking up the cipher letter and examining the figures. "Yes, you are right. The figure is nine with a dot over it, which represents nineteen and consequently 's' instead of 't.'"

The child's head was again bent over her task, and the detective watched her with a good deal of curiosity.

After a half an hour's patient work, she raised her fluffy little head again and declared that the task was completed.

Thad took the slip of paper on which she had written out the translation of his Italian, and read as follows:

"All right, the evidence is all against you. Nobody suspects the other. His blood will be upon your head, as you desired. Still, have no fear. Your rescue will be easy and sure."

That was all.

And when the detective had read it over half a dozen times, he shook his head dubiously.

The child had watched him intently, expecting his comment, good or bad.

She interpreted the shake of his head to mean that the work was not satisfactory.

"Is it not right?" she asked with an anxious voice.

"I do not doubt but it is, my child," rejoined the detective. "But I might just as well have left it in the Italian for all I can make out of it in the English."

"Don't you know what it means, sir?"

"No."

"I should think it meant that somebody had killed somebody else, and that some other person wanted to take the blame so as to shield the other one, and that it was all right."

"That is just what I make out of it, Juliette, but the trouble is to tell what that means, my child."

"That's so," she said slowly.

"Well, my girl, you had better retire now. You will find a neat little bed in that little room, just about your size."

"All right, sir," she replied, with a happy, childish smile. "May I kiss you good-night?"

"You will make me only too happy by doing so, my child," said he.

"You see," she continued, putting her little arms around his neck again, "I have had no papa since mamma left Mr. Gazippe, and mamma don't like to have me kiss her."

Thad took the poor, friendless child in his great strong arms and caressed her tenderly.

"Did the artist like to have you kiss him?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. He was never done loving me. Lots of times after I was asleep he would come to my bed and kiss me, and I would half-wake and know it was he."

"He must have been a pretty good man."

"The best that ever lived, except—" she broke off suddenly, "except you. I believe you are almost as good as he."

"I hope so," said Thad.

"I used to be so sad and lonesome for some one to love me and pet me after mamma left, that I would sometimes steal away and go back."

"Did your mamma object to your going to see him?"

"Oh, yes, sir; she whipped me whenever she found it out. At last she said that if I went any more she would kill me. Afterward she said she thought it would be better to kill Mr. Gazippe."

"You don't think she did it, do you?"

"I don't know. But one day I stole away and went to see him. As I was about to go up the steps I saw mamma coming down, so I hid till she went by, and then ran up-stairs as fast as ever I could. When I got into the studio, I found papa—Mr. Gazippe, I mean, dead, shot, and lying on the floor!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWINS.

AFTER the child had retired, Thad sat thinking for a long time.

This latest intelligence disturbed him.

He had received, from various sources, since going to work upon the case, no less than six different theories regarding the death of Vincenzo Gazippe, and now this simple child had introduced still another.

Which was the correct one?

Would it ever be possible, with these treacherous people as the only witnesses, to build a tangible chain of evidence out of the tangled mass of wild theory?

These thoughts worried him and rendered sleep impossible.

One thing he settled upon, however, and that was to have an examination of the first ruffian arrested as a suspect, the one whom Voque had first pointed out as having dropped the letter from Chester.

With this resolution in his mind, the detective finally threw himself down upon the lounge without undressing, just as day was dawning, and went to sleep.

He slept soundly for several hours, and woke to find the sun pouring in upon him and hear a happy childish voice singing.

Opening his eyes, he saw Juliette with a shining face fresh from a bath and radiant with smiles.

As soon as she saw that Thad was awake she ran to him and kissed him.

"Good-morning, papa," she cried, gleefully.

"I may call you papa, mayn't I?"

"Good-morning, Juliette," returned Thad.

"Certainly you may call me papa."

This little incident set the detective to thinking.

What a strange child this was.

No doubt she had called a dozen men papa, in her childish desire to have some one to love her as a parent.

In spite of the rude buffeting of the cold world, her affectionate nature went out to any and all who deigned to bestow a smile upon her.

The thought of it touched his great tender heart.

"You slept with your clothes on," she said, innocently, patting his cheek.

"Yes," he replied, absently.

"Do you always sleep with your clothes on, sir?"

"Not always, my child."

"My first papa used to sleep with his clothes on lots of times, but mamma said it was because he had been taking too much tea. Do you drink much tea, sir?"

"Not the kind that makes one sleep with his clothes on, my child," responded Thad, laughing at her simplicity. "But, my dear, we must get some breakfast, I think."

"I can cook, sir," she cried, ecstatically.

"Never mind. We will not bother about cooking this morning. We will go out to a restaurant."

"But this will cost lots of money."

"That is nothing. Get ready. We will think about cooking at another time."

The child was sorely disappointed that she was not allowed to get the breakfast, but was finally prevailed upon to get ready to go out with the detective.

In the mean time he had made his toilet, and

half an hour later they were on their way to the restaurant.

"I wonder," mused Thad, as they went along, the little girl clinging to his hand with all the confidence that she would have done had he been her real father, "I wonder how it is that children always take to me so readily."

The great, noble heart did not know itself, or it would never have asked the question.

Children took to him because they recognized in him a reflex of their own guileless, gentle natures, full of love and kindness.

It was a simple but pleasant little breakfast they had.

Pleasant because they were both happy, and a breakfast at a restaurant was a novelty to the child.

She asked a thousand questions about everything she saw, and Thad good-naturedly answered them, and was delighted.

Breakfast over, they returned to the apartments, where the detective, going into his dressing-room, proceeded to remove his disguise.

He desired to have an examination of the prisoner that morning, and of course, must appear in his own proper person.

It did not occur to him, in his abstraction with weightier thoughts, to inform the child that he was disguised before, and was about to resume his natural appearance.

Therefore when he came out of the dressing-room she did not recognize him.

She stared at him in alarm.

"Don't you know me, Juliette?" he asked in a kindly tone, smiling.

"No, sir, I never saw you before," she replied, edging away from him.

"Why, I'm your papa."

"Oh, no, you are not."

Here she ran back and peeped into the dressing-room which she had seen him enter.

A moment later she returned and looking at him very hard, asked:

"Where is he?"

"Whom?"

"Mr. Burr."

"I am he."

"Oh, no, you aren't," she affirmed.

"But I tell you I am," he insisted. "I have merely changed."

"Are you a friend of his?" she interrupted.

"Well, that is a question. Some say I am not," he said, laughingly.

"Then you are not my friend," she uttered promptly.

Thad then undertook to explain to her the mysteries of making up and his reasons for it.

But he found her inclined to be skeptical, and hard to convince.

Finally, however, after taking her into the dressing-room and showing her the various varieties of false beards, wigs, etc., used in making up, and partially restoring his former disguise, she was convinced.

But she was very unhappy with her knowledge.

Her idol was broken.

"I don't like you so well now," she said, with a deep sigh.

"Why, Juliette?"

"You don't look like my papa—Mr. Gazippe, I mean."

"But do you not think you can learn to like me in this guise?"

"I don't think so. Mamma would, though."

"Why would she?"

"Cause you look more like my first papa. He didn't wear any beard. That was the reason she was cross with you when you called yesterday."

"Because I resembled the artist, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Juliette, do you think you can amuse yourself here for awhile?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have some matters to attend to, and if I don't get back before evening, don't be alarmed. I shall see your mamma during the day, most likely, and will tell her that you are all right. Should you get hungry just touch this button," he went on, indicating an electric button on the wall, "and when they answer through this tube, tell them what you want, and they will send it up."

"Where from?" curiously.

"The floor below. I have arrangements with them to furnish meals whenever I want them. I usually prefer to go to the restaurant, but it will be better for you to have your meals in here while I am away."

"All right, sir."

"Good-by."

"Good-by, sir."

"Won't you kiss me?" he asked, extending his arms.

She hesitated.

Finally she put her arms around his neck rather reluctantly and kissed him.

"But you're not my papa," she protested, "except when you look the other way."

The detective laughed and took his leave.

Trivial as the matter was, however, it made an impression upon him.

An hour ago he was flattering himself that he was the hero of childish hearts, and it was humiliating to reflect that his popularity in the

present instance, at least, was the result of his resemblance to some one else.

The detective made his way at once to the Tombs prison.

When he had made his report known to the prison authorities, the two prisoners who resembled each other so strikingly were brought out for examination.

Not until now did the detective realize what a close resemblance the two men bore to each other.

They were both tall and powerfully built, possessed the same hang-dog, villainous expressions, and hair of a dirty brick-red tint.

They both slouched in their walk, and here was the first shade of diversity that Thad discovered in their likeness to one another.

The first man arrested was certainly slovenly enough in his gait, but it did not take an expert like Thad long to see that it bore a strong resemblance to the assumed gait of a stage ruffian.

He might be mistaken, but as the two men walked up and down the room side by side, he became more and more convinced of the fact.

Finally he said to the warden:

"You may take this fellow," indicating Sliney, "away, and I will examine the other."

His request was granted, and the prisoner was told to take a seat.

The detective seated himself directly in front of him so that the fellow could not evade his eye, and began his examination:

"What is your name?" he began.

"Buck Sliney," was the prompt, but dogged reply.

This was a surprise to start with.

"Tell me the truth," commanded Thad in a severe voice. "Remember your life is at stake!"

The fellow evinced no more emotion than if he had just been informed that his dinner was ready.

His face was a monument of stolidity.

"That's what me mudder called me," he replied, indifferently.

"But the prisoner who just left here claims that his name is Buck Sliney."

"I can't help dat."

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"What is your business?"

"I ain't got no reg'lar business. I depends on odd jobs, see?"

"What kind of odd jobs?"

"Most anyting to earn an honest penny."

"You wouldn't mind cracking a safe or slitting a wizen, if there was money in it, I suppose?"

"No, I ain't dainty, I ain't."

"Did you ever do anythng of the sort?"

"I might."

"But did you?"

"Dat's puttin' it rudder clost."

"I want a direct answer."

"Well, den, I has," uttered the fellow with a swagger.

"Where was you on the 17th of October?"

"Don't remember. Might 'a' bin drunk dat day."

"Do you know a man by the name of Harold Chester?"

"Slight."

"Did you ever do a job for him?"

"W'at kind of a job?"

"Any kind. Blood-letting, for instance."

A queer expression passed over the fellow's face and a devilish twinkle came in his eye.

"Yes," he finally answered.

"Who was the party?"

"Dat I done?"

"That you murdered?"

"We doesn't call it dat in our perfession."

"Never mind what you call it. Answer my question."

"De pabty's name was—"

"What?"

"Wait till I t'ink. He was a Dago, an' I ain't no good at names."

This was evidently thrown out to compel or induce Thad to suggest the name.

He refused to take the hint, however, and after waiting a reasonable time, said:

"Well?"

"I t'ink his name was something like Zippy, or Gippy—Gazippe—now I've got it."

"I'm glad you have. What was this Gazippe's business?"

"He was some sort of a dauber, I b'lieve, painted pictur's of angels an' t'ings, flyin' round widout no duds on."

"Where was the deed committed?"

"In de—de painter's shop."

"In his studio, you mean. Where was the studio located?"

"On Twenty-third street."

"East or west?"

"West."

"About what time of day was it?"

"Twenty minutes past twelve."

This was hitting the mark very closely.

Thad did not believe at the outset that this fellow had any more to do with the crime than the other ruffian, who was unable to tell the time of day at which the murder was committed.

But he now began to waver in his opinion. It

seemed incredible how any one, except the criminal, could know all the details of the affair as this fellow appeared to know them.

"How was the deed done?" continued Thad.

"Wid a gun."

"What kind of a gun?"

"A Smith and Wesson, fohty-two calibre."

"Where did you stand when you shot the artist?"

"On de platfo'm w'ere de model stands."

"How did you manage it? Tell me."

"Well, me an' Hank Mellon went into de studio, as yer calls it, or rudder, Hank staid outside an' I went in. De model was jest goin' out de back door, an' I waited till she got out."

"Was no one else there?"

"No."

"Go on."

"So I steps onto de platform. De artist was busy wid his paintin' an' didn't notice me. I made me calk'lations as ter w'ere his mug w'u'd be. I was behind de picture den, so he couldn't see me. Den I let him have it."

"Then what did you do?"

"I looked round to see if dere was any bloke pipin' me, an' when I t'ought it was all right, I jist puts de gun down near de dead 'un's hand ter make it look as if he'd done his own little racket, an' den sloped."

"And Chester hired you to do the job did he?"

"Yes."

"How much did he pay you?"

"Five hundred cold."

"Did he give any reason for wanting the artist murdered?"

"Yes, he said as how de artist was too fly wid his (Chester's) wife!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A TOUGH CUSTOMER.

THAD was astounded.

The prisoner's answers were so accurate that it seemed impossible that he could be other than the murderer.

But what could be his motive in confessing?

It could hardly be possible that he had had time to read the cipher letter and therefore could not hope for rescue.

Perhaps like Sliney, he expected to prove an *alibi* in the end.

At the conclusion of these reflections, the detective continued his examination of the prisoner.

Drawing the slip of paper which Voque claimed to have seen drop from the ruffian's pocket, he asked:

"Did you ever see that paper before?"

The fellow looked at in a stupid sort of way for a moment, and said:

"Yes, that's w'at Chester sent me w'en he wanted me to do de job. See?"

"Where did you lose it?"

This was particularly keen play on the detective's part.

If the fellow had really lost the paper accidentally he would not know where he had lost it. But if his story was a fabrication, the chances were that he would overlook that point and be too accurate.

The fellow was not to be caught.

Actor or real villain, he knew his part to perfection, and could not be tripped.

The answer came.

"How d'y'e s'pose I know w'ere I lost it? Folks don't generally know 'xactly w'ere they drops their purses, f'rinstance. If they did, priggin' would soon be a lost art. See?"

"But you might have known the last place you had it."

"De las' place I had it was in me pocket."

The fellow laughed at his own attempt at wit.

"When?" demanded Thad promptly, determined not to allow him time for reflection.

"Where I got me money."

"Where was that?"

"Third avenue, corner Ate."

"But you don't know whether you lost it in there or not?"

"No."

"Now don't you know that you never left that saloon from the time that you received your money until you were arrested?"

This was a surprise for him.

For the first time during the examination he evinced some concern.

But it appeared to soon pass.

"Come to think of it, I guess you're right," he finally replied.

"Then you must have lost it in there."

"I reckon so."

"Now, Sliney, that you have made a full unqualified confession of having committed a brutal murder for the sake of gain, the most heinous and contemptible species of crime that a man can be guilty of, perhaps you can inform me what motive you had for doing so."

"De crime?"

"No, the confession."

This appeared to be a tough question for the ruffian.

He evidently did not expect it.

After stammering and mumbling for a moment, he appeared to abandon the attempt and relapsed into silence.

"You must have had some motive," insisted Thad.

"Not as I knows of."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have deliberately put your neck into the halter without compulsion or incentive?"

"I guess so."

"Look here, Sliney, I'm too old a detective and know a little too much about human nature to swallow any such story. Tell me the truth. Are you not making this alleged confession for the purpose of shielding the real criminal?"

"No."

"Then you really committed the murder?"

"Yes."

"For money?"

"Yes."

"Then you hope to escape, or prove an *alibi* when you come to trial?"

"No I don't."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have deliberately sold your life for five hundred dollars?"

"Why not? De money's spent. Dere's no use livin' no longer."

"You expect to effect an escape?"

"No I don't."

Thad pulled the slip of paper, containing the figures, from his pocket.

Holding it up before the fellow's eyes, he asked:

"What is that?"

"I dunno. Looks like some figgerin'."

"You never saw it before, I presume?"

"No."

"What did the ball of bread which was thrown into your cell last night contain?"

"I dunno."

"You knew it contained some message?"

"No I didn't."

"What did you think it was?"

"Bread."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"Then why were you so careful to stick it away in the seam of the stones so that you thought nobody would find it?"

Thad imagined this would be a clincher.

He could not see how the prisoner could explain it.

But he was keener than he appeared.

"Well, you see, I knowed if it laid on de floor it would draw rats. So I stuck it up in de cbink. See?"

"How did you know it was going to be dropped into your cell?"

"Why, I heard a noise at de grate, an' t'ought it was a rat up dere, an' w'en I got up to look, lo, and behold de bread come rollin' down."

"Very good," said Thad, who could not help but admire the rascal's ingenuity. "But here is a point you have evidently overlooked."

"W'at's dat?"

"You cannot throw anything from the grating into the cell without assistance from the inside. If you remember, the grate in the pavement is not over the cell, but outside of it, and the light and air passing through it must pass through a small grated window before they can enter the cell, so that anything dropped through the grate above would fall outside of the grated window."

"Sure. If it was dropped. But anybody as knows de trick kin flip anyting t'rough de grate, easy."

"That is the way your friends managed it, was it?" asked Thad, thinking he had gained a point.

"I dunno. I dunno of no friends. All I know is dat de ball of bread fell in de cell."

"You have no idea who threw the ball of bread into your cell?"

"No."

"Nor what it contained?"

"No."

"Very likely story. But we will let that pass. Now, I took the trouble to decipher the figures in that paper, which proved to be Italian; and a little girl named Juliette Arlington—"

"Juliette Arlington?" and an expression of pain passed over his face.

"Yes. Do you know her?"

The fellow appeared to be swallowing a lump in his throat.

He finally got it down, and became as passive and indifferent as before.

"No. I t'ought I did, dat's all," he replied.

"Well, this Juliette Arlington," continued Thad, "translated it into English for me, and this is how it reads."

Here the detective took out the translation and read:

"All right. The evidence is all against you. Nobody suspects the other. His blood will be upon your head as you desired. Still have no fear. Your rescue will be easy and sure."

A cloud passed over the villain's face.

"Was dat in de ball o' bread?"

"Yes, as you doubtless know. What does it mean?"

"I dunno."

"You are sure that you had no previous communication that would throw light upon this?"

"No."

The fellow appeared to fall into a brown study at this point.

Suddenly he appeared to have an idea.

"I have it," he exclaimed.

"Well?"

"Some of me enemies done it."

"Why should your enemies do it?"

"Cause, see, dey knowed somebody'll figger it out an' tink I was about to cut sticks, an' den de prison blokes'd stop me in de irons or in de dark. See?"

"Very plausible!"

Thad was disgusted.

He still felt almost sure that the fellow was not what he represented himself.

But one thing was certain. If he was not the most consummate villain that ever went unhung, he was certainly one of the cleverest actors Thad had ever met.

"One more question, Sliney, and I am done.

Where do you live when you are at home?"

The fellow looked hurt.

"Do ye wanter tell me mudder dat I'm in limbo?" he asked.

"No, I simply want to know where you live."

"Wal, I'll tell ye, if ye'll promise not ter tell de ole woman w'at's in de wind."

"I won't tell her."

"Wal, den, it's on de sout'wes' corner o' Thirty-fifth street an' Avenue A, but don't tell de ole woman, cause it'll break her h'art."

"You have some regard for your mother still, I see."

"Yep. She's all right, an' I ain't goin' ter give her no pain if I kin help it. I don't keer nothin' fer t'other one."

"Who do you mean by t'other one?"

"Me wife. She's no good. An' say, w'ile ye'r' round dere, if ye don't mind, drop de ole woman a dime to rush de can. It'll cheer her up an' do her good while her boy's away."

"What is the matter with gin?" asked Thad, amused at the fellow's candor about his mother.

"No, don't do dat," pleaded the ruffian earnestly. "I'd rudder she wouldn't hit de gin. It makes her fight."

"All right, Sliney, I'll attend to it. Good-by."

"Good-by, sir."

And the guard took the prisoner back to his cell again.

"Well, what do you make of him?" asked the warden a moment later.

"I scarcely know what to think. He is either a very bad case or somebody that is successfully masquerading as such."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am half inclined to believe that he is no more a murderer than you and I: but that he is some fellow assuming the character for the sake of shielding the real criminal."

"In other words, he is either a villain or a hero, with odds in favor of the hero," laughed the warden.

"That is it, exactly," rejoined Thad.

"Well, what had we better do with him?"

"Leave him right where he is for a few days, but keep a close watch on him. I think it would be a good idea to station a policeman where he can have a good view of the east side of the prison to see that nobody communicates with him, or rather to intercept any communication that may be intended for him."

The warden laughed.

"Why, my dear sir, there is no earthly chance of any one communicating with prisoners from the outside," he declared.

"There is not, eh?"

"Certainly not."

"Look at this."

And Thad gave him the cipher letter.

The warden took it and looked at it for some time, and with a puzzled countenance, asked:

"What is it?"

"It looks like a lot of meaningless figures, doesn't it?"

"That is what it looks to me."

"Well, here is the translation of it."

And he handed him Juliette's translation.

"Well, well!" exclaimed the warden. "That is a strange document. Where did you get it?"

"In this fellow's cell."

"You don't mean it?"

"But I do."

"Don't you think it possible, even probable, that he wrote it himself?"

"I might think so if I had not seen it thrown into his cell with my own eyes."

"I don't understand you. Not from the outside, the street?"

"Certainly."

"Impossible!"

"True, nevertheless."

"Do you understand how the cells are built?"

"I do."

"How could a note be thrown into the cell?"

"In a pellet of bread. The party on the outside first gave the prisoner a signal, and then threw the ball down. It is my opinion that the fellow inside assisted him in some way, but he indignantly denies it."

"He must have done so. Well," continued the warden, "I will see that your idea is carried out."

"Have your guard conceal himself," said Thad, "so that the confederate cannot see him, and allow the latter to do his work, and whatever is thrown down take possession of it at once, and communicate with me."

"All right."

CHAPTER XVII.

A HUMAN TIGRESS.

THAD's first move on leaving the prison was to call upon Juliette's mother.

The child had told him where she was stopping—with some friends on Tenth street; but he first went to the house on Twentieth street where he had first met her.

Everything appeared deserted about the first floor flat where Lavardo lived, but, nothing daunted, Thad rung the bell.

While he was awaiting an answer, it occurred to him that now if she should happen to be in, and as she wouldn't recognize him, he could doubtless pump a good deal of information out of her.

There was no response to the first ring, and he rung again.

Presently he heard footsteps, and a moment later the door opened.

To his surprise, Mrs. Gazippe stood before him.

She did not recognize him, of course, and to his inquiry for Mr. Lavardo, she replied that he was out.

"How soon will he return?" asked the detective.

"I cannot tell exactly," she replied. "Will you come in?"

He walked into the little front office and sat down.

"How long since he went out?" he asked.

The woman colored and showed other indications of confusion.

"It has been a good while," she finally made out to answer.

"To-day?"

This seemed to embarrass her more still.

"No; yesterday," she faltered.

"Then you are all alone, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

At this she looked at him very hard, as if unable to make out what he was getting at.

"I was speaking to Mr. Lavardo some time ago about buying a piece of property which he had for sale, and I have concluded to take it if it has not been sold."

She made no reply to this, but kept her eyes fixed on him.

This rendered Thad a little restless.

"I wonder if she recognizes me?" he mused.

As she still remained silent, he continued the conversation himself.

"Where is the little girl I saw when I was here before?" he asked.

"She is away, visiting friends," replied the woman.

"In the country, no doubt?"

"Yes."

"She is a bright, pretty child. I presume you wouldn't think of parting with her?"

"What do you mean?"

"Of allowing a wealthy man, who could give her all the advantages of education and station, to adopt her as his daughter."

This was a master-stroke.

The woman softened at once.

"Why, I don't know, sir. If she could have advantages beyond what I can give her, I wouldn't mind, for her sake, making the sacrifice."

"Very well, I want just such a child as she struck me as being, and, being wealthy, I will guarantee that she shall want for nothing."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed the woman.

"And as for yourself—"

"Don't consider me," she interrupted.

"Only care for my child."

"But I could not see you want for anything."

"Thank you, very much."

"But as I am going home to-day," continued the detective, "I must have her to-day with me. Will it be possible to get her here?"

"Oh, yes. She is not very far away. Where do you live, sir?"

"In California."

"Indeed! That will be delightful for Juliette, I'm sure."

This last statement, and in fact the woman's whole demeanor, demonstrated to Thad the fact that the woman cared nothing

for the child and was only too anxious to get her out of the way.

"Very well," he said. "What time shall I call for the child?"

"It is noon now," rejoined the woman.

"Say four o'clock this afternoon."

"That will do. Will it be necessary to see her father?"

The woman blushed again.

"She has no father," she exclaimed.

"Ah, I see. Your husband is dead?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Lavardo is not your husband, then?"

"Oh, no, he is my brother."

"Now, do you think it would be possible to see your brother before I go away?"

"I don't know, sir; I will see."

"You have no idea where I can find him in the city, I presume?"

"No, sir."

Thad could not understand her confusion at this question.

"Well, Mrs.— What did I understand your name to be?"

"Gazippe."

Thad pretended to be very much startled at this announcement.

"No relation to the late artist of that name, I presume?" he queried.

"He was my husband."

"Indeed? A dreadful bereavement, I well understand. Gazippe was a fine fellow. I knew him well. You must miss him greatly."

"Oh, yes," she replied, coolly.

"Let me see: he was killed, wasn't he? Or did he commit suicide?"

The woman grew very nervous.

"Suicide," she answered, in an almost inaudible voice.

"Too bad! You have my heartiest sympathy, Mrs. Gazippe."

She made no reply.

"Now, Mrs. Gazippe, I will go. You may expect me about four o'clock."

"Very well, sir."

And Thad took his leave.

He lost no time in returning to his lodgings, where he found Juliette as merry as a lark, enjoying a lunch, which she had ordered up, all alone.

"I'm so glad you've come!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him. "They sent up twice as much as I could eat, and you can help me with it."

"It is very kind of you, my child," replied the detective, sitting down to the table. "Then you do think a little of me, after all?"

"Oh, yes, lots!" she confessed. "Only I won't call you—yes, I will, too; I'll call you papa. For although you ain't half so nice and pretty as when you have your side-whiskers on, still you're good, if you ain't pretty."

"You are complimentary," cried Thad, laughing.

"No, I only say just what I think."

"That's right, my child. Though it will not always do."

"No? Why?"

"Some people will object to it. I say, Juliette, do you want to go back to your mamma?"

"No, siree!" she exclaimed, emphatically.

"Why?"

"I don't like her, and she don't like me."

"But she wants you."

"Did you see her?"

"Yes."

"Did she like you?"

"I can't say as to that. But she is coming after you this afternoon."

"Please, sir, don't let her take me!" pleaded the child.

"All right, I won't let you go, if you do not wish it; but you will have to leave here."

"Where will I go?" inquired the child in alarm.

"I will take you to my own house."

The girl looked surprised at this.

"Ain't this your house?" she asked.

"One of them; but I have a house like everybody else, and a daughter."

"Like me?"

"No. She used to be small, like you, but she is a young woman now."

"Will she like me?"

"I have no doubt she will."

"Well, I'd like to go then."

"We cannot go too soon, my child, for your mother is likely to be here very soon."

"Let's go now, then."

"All right."

A few minutes later they were on the street.

To avoid the possibility of meeting any one that they did not care to see, Thad procured a hack and had himself and the child driven to his home on Thirty-fourth street, near Tenth avenue.

Merely stopping long enough to explain to his wife why he had brought the child there, Thad immediately sprung into the hack and drove back to his apartments on Thirteenth street.

Reaching his "studio," he proceeded at once to make himself up in the guise he had been in when he first called at the Lavardo house.

He was none too hasty with his work either, for he had no more than finished it when a ring at the bell announced a visitor.

On opening the door he found, as he expected he would, Juliette's mother.

Although she must have known that she would meet the detective, she appeared greatly embarrassed at sight of him.

"Pardon me," she faltered, "I want my daughter."

"Your daughter?" exclaimed Thad in simulated surprise.

"Yes, sir. Is she not here?"

"She is not, madam."

The woman looked bewildered.

"I—I thought—she intended to come here," she stammered.

"What for?"

"For—for protection."

"Protection? Against whom?"

"Our enemies."

Thad could see now that the story told him by the child had been manufactured by the mother to frighten her and get her out of the way.

"Where did you tell her to go?" asked Thad.

"Here."

"And she probably went to a better place, the Police Headquarters."

"Do you think so?"

"Possibly. That is the proper place to go for protection."

"But I cannot see why she has not returned."

"When did you send her?"

"Last night."

"Maybe they have sent her to the Orphans' Home, madam."

"Is it possible?"

"It is the most likely thing that they would do. If you will come in I will telephone to Headquarters and see."

"Thank you."

And she walked in and took a seat.

Thad then went to the telephone, and, after disconnecting it with the central office, called the latter, and then pretended to carry on a conversation with the sergeant of the Police Headquarters.

At the end of the bogus conversation he turned to the woman with the announcement:

"Your daughter has not been there."

"Where in the world can she be, I wonder?"

"You say you were in danger of persecution by enemies?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you think it possible then that those enemies may have got your daughter?"

"Do you think so?" she asked in alarm.

"I ask you the question."

"I don't know. It may be so."

"Who are these enemies?"

"I cannot, dare not tell."

"Are they so bad that you are unsafe in your house, madam?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And yet you want to take your daughter there again?"

"No, sir, not permanently. A gentleman is going to adopt her and take her away to California."

"Who is this gentleman?"

"Mr.—I forget his name. A friend of mine."

"Ah, indeed! And you are willing to let your daughter go with a man with whom you are not well enough acquainted to remember his name, are you?"

"I know his name well enough, but it eludes my memory just now."

"What would you think if I should tell you that the man with whom you propose

sending your daughter away, is a total stranger to you? That you never saw him until about noon to-day, and that you never heard his name in your life?"

The woman grew extremely pale and nervous.

She appeared unable to find an answer to the detective's question.

"What would you say to that?" he repeated.

"That you were mistaken, sir," she finally managed to falter.

"And what would you say, madam," continued Thad, disregarding her remark, "if I should tell you that you are simply sending your daughter away to get her out of your road lest, not your enemies, as you claim, but the officers of justice should discover you, at a time when you wish to hide, through your child?"

The woman became terribly agitated, but made no reply.

"If there was any chance of this being untrue, why did you send your child here, madam, with the lie on her innocent lips that you were driven from your home by enemies, two men and a woman, and that you had taken refuge with friends, where you were prostrated with illness?"

At this announcement the woman's whole attitude changed.

From the frightened, half-suppliant creature of a moment ago, she had suddenly assumed an expression and attitude of defiance, while the fire of passion blazed in her black eyes.

Still she did not speak.

"What was your motive for this lie to your child," the detective continued, "unless you had something to conceal, some awful crime to cover up, not only from the world, but from your own child? Tell me that!"

She rose, pale and cold as a statue.

There was no nervousness or agitation about her now, and her black eyes fairly blazed.

"Where is my child, sir?" she demanded, in a low, hoarse voice.

"You shall never know," Thad replied, "until you have confessed your crime."

"Give me my child," she repeated in the same hoarse guttural. "Give me my child, or I swear that you shall be a dead man before to-morrow morning!"

"If you will confess your crime to me, you shall have her, and not before."

"Do you refuse to give me my child?" she demanded, her voice rising to a passionate pitch.

"I do."

"Then take that!"

She sprang at him like a tigress at her prey, and a keen blade gleamed in her uplifted hand!

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALWAYS ON HAND.

THE result of the Italian woman's spring and thrust would have been fatal to ordinary men.

And even with Thad, expert as he was, he had to use his utmost skill to parry the blow of the murderous steel.

Her quickness and agility were something remarkable, even in an Italian woman; but Thad Burr was always on guard in supreme moments like this.

His dealings with people of strong passions and desperate courage had been so vast that he was always on the alert for treachery.

So, without losing his coolness and self-possession, he allowed her to throw herself headlong at his breast, but in a twinkling put out his giant palm toward the uplifted hand that grasped the glittering blade.

In the fraction of a second the steel-strong fingers closed about the slender wrist like a vise.

An adroit twist unnerved the little hand, and the knife dropped to the floor.

"Misspent passion, madam," remarked the detective, coolly, stooping to pick up the knife. "That little game might go with amateurs, but you are dealing with an old stager now."

The woman was silent.

She was evidently cowed, but far from conquered.

"I guess the best thing I can do with you," he said, "is to lock you up."

This had a magic effect.

The woman's bearing underwent as sudden and radical a change as it had on the previous occasion.

Her cynicism softened. The hard face grew pitifully penitent. The eyes ceased to blaze, and grew moist with a woman's tears.

"You won't lock me up, will you, sir?" she pleaded, piteously.

"I don't see how I can help it," Thad replied.

"Please have mercy upon me—"

"You did not think of mercy a moment ago, when you attempted to stab me to the heart."

"I know that," she pleaded, "but remember the provocation. You refused to give me my child, my darling child!"

There appeared to be something genuine in her exhibition of feeling now.

And she was using a dangerous weapon upon Thad, if she had known it.

He almost lost courage at her first threat, but he steeled himself against his own feelings.

Duty is a cold, bitter thing, especially to a man with Thad Burr's soft heart.

"You did not think of your child, madam," he went on, "when you wanted to send her away with a stranger to a distant section, where you did not know what would become of her."

"It was for her good," she urged.

"Possibly. But you did not know the man who was to take her."

"Truly I did, sir."

"Who is he?"

"His name is—"

"What?"

She hesitated.

"Jones," she finally answered.

"I thought so," he remarked, amused at her desperate attempt to deceive him.

"Yes, Jones," she repeated, firmly, believing that she had impressed the detective with the truth of her assertion.

"Have you known him long?" he asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Oh, yes."

"How long?"

"I should think—"

"Twenty years?"

"No, about ten years."

"I see. An old acquaintance, at any rate."

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see," said Thad, in a musing tone of voice, turning his face away from her, but keeping her in view by means of a large mirror; "it strikes me that I know this Jones myself. What is he like? Light hair, blue eyes, smooth face?"

Here he removed his false side-whiskers.

"Yes, yes."

"Rather large and well-built?"

"Yes, that is he."

Here he slipped off the dark, curly wig, leaving his own natural hair, which was light and straight.

"Good-natured and jovial in appearance?" he continued.

"Yes, sir. You must have seen him," she cried eagerly.

"I know I have; frequently."

"Where? In—"

"Here!"

And Thad turned upon her with his natural face.

The woman shrieked.

"You haven't forgotten an old friend, I hope?" he said, smiling.

She shuddered and was silent.

"A friend of ten years' standing," he continued.

She was still silent, and began to take refuge in woman's universal harbor—tears.

"You see, madam," he resumed, earnestly, "lying doesn't pay, especially to a detective."

She was conquered now.

She had covered her face and was sobbing bitterly.

Heartily as he loathed the woman for her deceit and heartlessness he could not repress a certain feeling of pity for her.

Still, duty, relentless duty stood before him, and placed her icy hand upon his heart.

"When I came to your house to-day," he went on, "I did not expect to find you there. I was foolish enough to believe the lie which your little girl had innocently borne from your lips, and believed you were at that mo-

ment languishing in the bed of disease, and at the same time eluding the pursuit and persecution of relentless enemies.

"My first question to you was answered by a lie, and I discovered your utter want of maternal affection by proposing to adopt your daughter.

"To my inquiry as to her whereabouts you answered with another lie—that your daughter was in the country.

"You lied to the child when you told her that you was in danger of enemies.

"You lied to her when you told her that you were going to the house of a friend.

"You lied to her when you told her you were sick and confined to your bed.

"You deceived the innocent child by appealing to her sympathy, but I saw through your transparent mask at a glance."

The woman underwent another change.

Her sobbing ceased, and she became calm.

Yet she was neither defiant nor suppliant this time.

She appeared reasonable, subtle and ready to discuss matters.

"Have you done with your accusations?" she asked in a calm voice.

This was a surprise to the detective.

So much so, that he could find no immediate reply.

"If you have," she went on in the same cold, passionless voice, "I have something to say."

"Well?" was all he could respond.

"You accuse me of wanting to get my child out of the way. It is true; but I have a reason for it, other than you imagine. I admit that you deceived me when you came to my house in a different guise to that in which I saw you before. That should be sufficient excuse for my telling you that I knew the man who wanted to adopt my child.

"You accuse me of a want of maternal affection. Perhaps I have; but if so, I have a good reason for it. When you know how that child, young as she is, has conspired with my late husband to render my life wretched, you will neither wonder at a want of maternal affection nor my desire to send her away where she will not only cease to torment me, but learn to lead a better life.

"My story, which you denounce as a falsehood, about the enemies persecuting me, is strictly true, except so far as my having to seek protection in the house of a friend, and about my being ill, and that, although you may not credit it, is the invention of that wicked child."

Thad listened to this story with amazement.

The woman's apparent earnestness and candor would have convinced nine people out of ten, and Thad as well as the rest, if he had not already detected her in so many falsehoods.

After she had ceased to speak he remained silent for some moments, calmly studying her face, and his mind underwent a series of revolutions during the time.

At one time he thought she must be one of the subtlest female villains he ever met, and at another he would almost arrive at the conclusion that she was what she affected to be, a persecuted saint.

Finally he said:

"If you have nothing in your life which you wish to conceal, why not tell me who these enemies are?"

"I cannot."

"And why did you send your daughter here at midnight?"

"To get her away from my enemies."

"Lest they should kill or injure her?"

"Yes."

"And yet you did not know what dangers she would incur in crossing a great city at midnight. That did not disturb you apparently."

"I knew she could not be worse off than at home under the circumstances."

"Did you not rather send her away for fear that she would betray you to your enemies?"

"Perhaps."

"I thought so. Now, madam, let me give you a version of this business. To start with, your enemies are like the old acquaintance, Jones, a myth."

"No, no," she insisted. "They are real, and—"

"In the next place, you claim to get your

child away from you because she knows too much."

"What do you mean?"

"She knows more of your past life than you care to tell the world."

"How do you know?" she cried, in alarm.

"The child gave me a few hints which, if followed up, might make an ugly story against you."

"What did she say?"

"She said enough."

"Oh, sir, you must not believe anything that wicked child tells you. She will never tell the truth if she can help it!"

"Where did she inherit this trait?"

"She did not inherit it. She learned it from Gazippe."

"It strikes me that I have noticed an inclination on the other side of the house to stretch the truth as occasion offered."

"The wicked thing!" she cried. "If I knew that she had told—"

She checked herself suddenly and changed color.

"What?"

"Anything bad about me," she qualified.

"She said nothing bad about you, except that you had sworn to take the life of your late husband, and that as she was on her way to see him, she saw you coming away, and when, a moment later, she arrived at the studio, she found the artist murdered."

This did not have the effect upon the woman that he expected it would.

Instead of crushing her or throwing her into a helpless state of confusion, as you would expect in a murderess, it appeared only to arouse her wrath against the child.

"The wicked little liar!" she hissed. "If I had her at this moment, I would wring her neck!"

"And add another crime to your life?" suggested Thad.

"No!" she cried, vehemently. "What you have hinted and she has said are lies, base, malicious lies, from beginning to end. I was not near the studio at the time of the murder, nor had I been there for six months previous to that time."

"Was the child there?"

"I do not know."

"Who could she have seen that she mistook for you?"

"I cannot tell."

"Madam, your denial will have little weight with a jury, unless you can prove something."

"And I can."

"That you were at another place?"

"Not only that, but I can prove who the murderer is."

"Indeed! Why don't you divulge that now, and save yourself the humiliation of incarceration and subsequent trial for murder?"

"What do you mean?"

"That I am going to take you into custody."

"No, you won't!"

"Oh, yes, I will," and the detective took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and moved toward the woman.

"Hold out your hands," he commanded.

"I won't!" she cried.

"You had better submit peaceably than to compel me to use force."

"You cannot use force upon me," she uttered savagely; "and you cannot take me! I will die first!"

He continued to move toward her, while she as constantly retreated backward.

"Stand back!" she screamed.

Thad made no reply, but continued advancing toward her.

"Stand back, I say!" she repeated, "or you are a dead man!"

Thad smiled at the idle threat, and continued to move toward her with the handcuffs in his outstretched hands.

She had by this time retreated to the door leading from the sitting-room into the back room, which was closed with a *portiere*.

Here she paused for an instant, and bent her fiery eyes upon the approaching detective.

"Stop!" she cried. "If you come a foot further you are a dead man! Take warning in time, and don't come any further!"

Thad did pause. But not through fear. It was simply to laugh at her silly banter.

"You will laugh in a different key in a

moment," she uttered through her clinched teeth.

"Yield, foolish woman!" he said in a gentle voice. "I have no desire to hurt you, but I must do my duty. Don't imagine that you can frighten me with your idle threats. Thad Burr is not a man to be frightened by man or woman."

With that he started toward her again.

Quicker than a flash she sprung through the curtains and disappeared.

Thad continued on his course and was within a foot or two of the curtains, when they flew suddenly apart and the misshapen form of Namby Voque appeared with a huge revolver in each hand, leveled at the detective's head.

"Stop!" yelled the dwarf in his squeaky voice. "That is—stop—or I'll—that is, if I may be allowed—shoot!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A POOR SHOT.

If it had been a headless man or a ghost, or any other unnatural apparition making its appearance between the *portieres*, the detective could not have been more surprised than he was at the appearance of the dwarf.

What puzzled him principally was how he had got in.

A horrible suspicion flashed upon him.

Yes, in the very supreme moment of apparently imminent peril, his mind was crossed with a suspicion.

Could it be that Juliette had betrayed him?

It seemed impossible that the dwarf could have got into the place without her knowledge and consent.

And yet, it almost broke his heart to even harbor the thought for an instant.

"All these reflections flashed through his mind like the glint of a sunbeam upon a passing mirror, and were gone.

And all the while he was looking down the yawning muzzle of Voque's pistols.

He felt not the least tremor or qualm of fear at the sight.

But rather amused than otherwise.

Notwithstanding, the sight of the hideous dwarf gave him the shivers.

"Stop, or I'll—that is—shoot!" repeated the dwarf, in his rasping voice that was several degrees more strident now, under the pressure of excitement, than usual.

"Oh, I guess not," retorted Thad humorously. "You wouldn't shoot, if you could help it."

This kind of banter to most men on the point of shooting has, as Thad was well aware, the effect of unnerving them and thwarting their motive, but the dwarf was one of those peculiarly constructed creatures that seem to possess neither feeling nor discretion.

Taking it for granted that his indifference to fear would deter the little villain from putting his threat into execution, Thad advanced coolly upon him.

Once more the dwarf yelled:

"Stop, or I'll—that is—"

But he didn't finish the sentence.

Thad was so close upon him that he was driven to instantaneous action.

And he acted.

A terrific roar filled the house with its echoes, and a dense smoke told of the discharge of both pistols.

But the dwarf's aim must have been execrable.

For, although he was no more than four feet from the detective, when the smudge cleared away it revealed that gentleman still in the flesh and without a scratch.

And then, before the dwarf had time to recover or recock, Thad had closed in upon him and grasped both his hands.

But right here the detective was treated to another surprise.

He had always looked upon the dwarf as an imbecile, as impotent as his appearance indicated.

In this he was mistaken.

On the contrary, he found the fellow a perfect little Hercules.

And powerful as was his own strength, the dwarf easily wrenched his wrists free.

This was partly owing, of course, to Thad's misjudgment of the little fellow's strength.

The moment the little fellow was free, he sprang away, behind the curtain, and before the detective could reach him had fired another shot from each revolver at the *portiere* behind which he knew Thad to be.

An instant later Thad was through the curtains.

But it was too late.

The dwarf had leaped into the secret elevator and disappeared.

Thad then realized what his own carelessness had brought him to.

On the previous night, when the detective went down the elevator in pursuit of the dwarf and the little woman, he had neglected to close the secret panel.

Realizing the futility of following the dwarf, Thad turned his attention to the woman.

But when he looked about for her he discovered, to his disappointment, that she was nowhere to be found.

It was only the work of a few minutes to reach every nook and corner of the place, and at the end of that time he was compelled to give it up.

She was gone.

Thad had had many sore disappointments in his life as a detective, but none greater than this one.

He believed that he had found in the woman the real perpetrator of the horrible crime, the mystery of which he had been so long and earnestly endeavoring to solve, and now to have her slip through his fingers was almost too much for the man's endurance.

How could she have escaped?

Certainly not by way of the elevator too.

And yet how else could she have gone?

But if she had gone by way of the elevator, how could it be up ready to receive the dwarf?

Then it flashed upon him.

These people had a preconcerted plan.

As soon as the woman got to the bottom, and while the dwarf was holding Thad at bay, she ran the elevator up again to enable her confederate to escape.

Thad had only to relock his secret panel now and turn his attention to other matters.

First of all he must, if possible discover the whereabouts of the two men, Chester and Lavardo, and, as that would entail another visit to each of their houses, it would be necessary to adopt a new disguise in order that the people in question should not recognize him as the same person that was there before.

After considering for some time what disguise he would adopt, he concluded to choose that of an artist.

He had employed this on previous occasions and could play the part to perfection, besides, he had a splendid make-up and costume for the purpose.

By using the French accent, of which he was a master, and representing himself as the agent of some celebrated artist, he would have a disguise and an excuse for calling at the same time.

As soon as he had matured his plan, the detective went to work to carry it out, and in the course of half an hour came forth from his dressing-room a complete artist, in appearance, at least, with a decided French cast of countenance.

On consulting his watch, he found it was still a half an hour to six, and as he did not care about putting in an appearance at the Chesters before eight, he decided to go and get his dinner at home on this evening.

It was a privilege he did not often have a chance to enjoy while at work upon a case.

A brisk walk of twenty minutes brought the detective to his house.

As he ascended the stoop his wife came to the door to greet him.

He was surprised to notice an anxious expression on her face.

"Where is the child?" she inquired, as soon as he was near enough to address.

"What child?" he asked in surprise.

"The little girl you brought here shortly after noon."

"I'll have to ask you that question, my dear," he rejoined. "I have seen nothing of her since I left her here. Isn't she here?"

"No. I thought she was with you."

"How could you think that, my dear?"

"Because the woman said that she was going to take her to you, that you wanted her."

"What woman?"

"The woman you sent after the child."

"I sent no woman after the child."

"You did not?"

"No."

"Great heavens! Then my worst fears are realized!" exclaimed his wife. "I had some misgivings as soon as she was gone."

"What do you mean, my dear? You speak in riddles."

"Why, a woman came here about an hour ago, claiming to be the child's mother, and said that you had sent her for the child."

"And you let her go?"

"Certainly. How should I know that she was an impostor?"

"You could certainly have told whether it was the child's mother or not."

"I am sure it was her mother, for the child addressed her as such."

"I see it all," exclaimed Thad, disconsolately. "The woman was at my studio, and I was on the point of arresting her, when she gave me the slip. And I have no doubt that she came directly here as soon as she made her escape. The puzzle of it is how she knew, first, where I live, and second, that the girl was here."

"I can probably clear your mind upon both points, my dear," said his wife.

"I wish you would."

"A half an hour before the woman came there was a very ugly dwarf came to the door."

"Yes, I know," interposed Thad. "That infamous Voque. What did he want?"

"He merely inquired whether you lived here or not."

"Didn't he ask about the girl?"

"Not a word. Indeed it was unnecessary, for the moment he appeared at the door she saw him, and, child-like, peeped out at him."

"I see it all now," repeated the detective, sadly. "The cunning imp was too sharp to make any inquiry when he saw the girl, lest he should arouse suspicion. Did the girl object to going with her mother, my dear?"

"Yes. She declared that she would not go, and pleaded with me to save her from the woman; but on the other hand, the woman cried so piteously, and added that you had ordered her to come for the child, so what could I do?"

"Nothing but what you did, my dear. But it is none the less unfortunate. Never mind, I will be up with the lot of them yet. Is dinner ready?"

"Yes; but you don't mean to say that you are going to honor us with your presence at dinner, do you, Thad?"

"On this occasion, yes."

"This is an agreeable surprise. Come in," said his wife in high glee.

A little later Thad sat at the head of his table, which was surrounded by his little family, consisting of his wife, his daughter Beatrice, who was now a young lady, and his two sons, Stephen and Thaddeus, junior.

"It seems odd to have papa here," remarked Beatrice.

"And pleasant," added Thad, jr.

"Certainly. But it is so seldom we have papa," continued the daughter, "that he seems like a guest."

"Oh, well, my dears," interposed the detective in a kindly voice, "it is to be hoped that the time will come before long, when I can give up this unpleasant business and be with you more."

"Unpleasant business?" exclaimed Mrs. Burr. "Why, I thought you took great pleasure in the detective business."

"So I do, except for the fact that it keeps me away from my darlings so much."

"Are there not a great many dangers connected with it, papa?" asked Beatrice.

"Yes, my child. A detective may be said to carry his life in his hand all the time. No less than five attempts have been made upon my life inside of a week."

"When was the last attempt made, papa?" inquired Stephen, the younger son.

"About an hour and a half ago."

"By whom?"

"The dwarf who was here this afternoon."

"How did he do it?"

"Fired at me twice with two big pistols."

"Both at once?" cried Thad, jr., in surprise.

"Both at once."

"And didn't kill you?"

"Well, if he did, the ghost of your father is dining with you to-night," replied Thad, laughing.

"Well, I wouldn't mind having such marksmen as he fire at me," put in Beatrice.

"I don't know about that," said the detective. "It is sometimes the worst marksmen who make the luckiest shots. For it is a question of luck where a man fires under great excitement."

"I should say," said Thad, jr., "that it was a question of nerve and coolness."

"You are right, my boy," cried the detective, enthusiastically. "You'll make a detective yet."

"What did the dwarf do, after he fired and missed you, papa?" asked Stephen, anxious to have more of the story.

"Ran, of course."

"And escaped?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you shoot him?"

"I didn't happen to have a pistol in my hand at the time, and he jumped upon the elevator and got away."

The meal proceeded in silence for a little while.

Finally Thad turned to his wife with the question:

"What did you think of the woman that was here this afternoon, my dear?"

"The child's mother?"

"Yes."

"Why, I thought at the time that she was a very quiet, gentle person."

"You wouldn't think her capable of drawing a knife and making a lunge at a fellow, would you?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, that is just what she did to me not a half an hour before you saw her."

"You don't say! What did she do that for?"

"Because I refused to let her have her daughter, my dear."

"Why didn't you want to let her have her daughter, Thad?"

"Because, in the first place, she sent the child to me so as to have her out of the way when she wanted to do some of her deviltry and because the child knows too much of her past life; and again, I am pretty well satisfied that the woman is a murderess."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, I believe she murdered her husband the artist."

"Heavens!" cried Mrs. Burr, turning pale. "I am glad I did not offer any serious objection to her taking her daughter!"

"It probably is fortunate."

The dinner finally came to an end, and Thad, after kissing his wife and daughter and bidding them all farewell, started for the Chester mansion.

CHAPTER XX.

IN LUCK AT LAST.

THAD in due time reached the Chester mansion, which he found to be a blaze of light.

"There must be some entertainment going on," he mused. "I'm in luck, for the master of the house will certainly be at home on such an occasion as this."

With that he touched the electric button.

A moment later a liveried footman opened the door.

Thad gave in his card on which was engraved—

"MONS. PAUL DU PUY,

ARTIST,

16 RUE CAPUCIN,

PARIS."

"Mr. or Mrs. Chester?" queried the lackey.

Thad was determined to be on the safe side this time; so he replied:

"For ze madame."

The footman bowed, and stepped aside for the detective-artist to enter.

After showing him into the drawing-room, the flunky departed with the card.

As he took his seat Thad instinctively glanced about for the little lady, but to his disappointment she was nowhere to be seen.

He had not to wait long for the madam.

In fact, he had scarcely got settled in his seat when the rustle of silken skirts announced her coming.

She was elegantly dressed, in a white satin

gown, cut *decollete*, which again suggested the idea of an entertainment, and the detective could not but notice that she was very beautiful.

"This is the artist, I presume?" she said, advancing and extending her hand.

"Ze same, madame," replied Thad. "I hope zat I find ze beautiful madame in good health?"

"Quite good, I thank you," she rejoined, sinking into an easy-chair. "What brings the great artist here, may I ask?"

"I have come, madame," said Thad, shrugging in the true French fashion, "to introduce one grand picture, painted by ze great Detaille, which I shall sell at private sale to some man wiz ze taste of ze connoisseur."

"Then I am afraid you have come to a poor place, monsieur," said the lady, smiling. "There are no connoisseurs here."

"Pardon, madame, eef ze taste display on ze walls of your *salon* are one indication, I shall say zat zare eez."

"My husband has some notion of pictures; but I have none."

"Ah, your husband? Ez he at home, madame?"

"Not at present."

"Ah, I am—what you call—chagrin. I should so much like to meet him. He will miss a great bargain in zis picture. Can you tell me, madame, when he will be most likely to come home?"

"I cannot. He is likely to return any moment."

"Ah, zen, he may be here in one leetle while, *n'est pas*?"

"Perhaps," she replied indifferently.

Thad saw that she was gradually falling into her accustomed lethargy, which he had noticed on his previous visit.

So he determined to liven up the conversation a little.

"Have you, madame," he said, "ze acquaintance of any of ze American artists?"

"Very few," she replied languidly.

"You did not know my friend Gazippe zen, I presume?"

"Slightly."

"Poor fellow! Et eez a shame zat so bright, so handsome, so good a fellow, should fall at ze hands of a red-handed assassin, do you not sink so, madame?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, dreamily.

"You do not take much interest in ze man, madame?"

"Why should I?"

"I imagined zat all ze ladies were in raptures ovair him. So ze ladies were in Pary."

"Then the ladies of Paris are different from us. I go into raptures over no one. And now, monsieur, I shall have to ask you to excuse me," she said, rising.

"*Certainement*, madame," responded Thad, also rising and bowing obsequiously.

With that she swept out of the room.

"This is a pretty go," mused the detective. "About as much learned from this visit as from the former one."

He had learned two things, however.

One was that Chester was not at home, and from the way his wife acted he did not believe he had been since the occasion of the previous visit. And the other was that Mrs. Chester still wore the odd ear-drop.

He waited for some time after the lady's departure, ostensibly for the return of Chester, but in reality in the hope of seeing the little Miss Petero.

He had no idea that Chester would return that night, or any other night soon, but he did hope that Miss Petero might put in an appearance, so that he could interview her.

But to his disappointment, after half an hour's wait she had still not appeared, and he took his departure.

There appeared to be something wrong all around, for when he got outside he did not see the dwarf skulking about.

"There is something strange about this man Chester," mused Thad. "I can neither find him nor find anybody that knew him. If I could only find Lavardo, he might give me some idea of where to look for Chester. The fact of the business is, I believe that Chester, Lavardo and the latter's sister, are mixed up in this affair, and the two men have fled the city."

"Well," he sighed, "there is one thing I can do. I can hunt up and arrest Juliette's

mother, and rescue the child from her vile clutches."

With this resolution in his mind, the detective jumped into a cab and had himself driven to the house on West Thirteenth street.

As on the occasion of his visit in the morning, the house was shut up as though the inmates were away.

Only now the fact was more noticeable, owing to the absence of lights.

Nevertheless, Thad ran up the stoop and pulled the bell.

The door was opened and he stepped in and rapped at the door of the little front office.

The inmates must have anticipated his coming, for before the echo of his last rap had died away, the door was thrown open.

Namby Voque stood in the door.

The dwarf stared at the detective very hard, but evidently did not recognize him this time, for he asked, before Thad had time to utter a word:

"What is it—that is—what is it?"

"Eez ze shentleman of ze house, Monsieur Lavardo, in?" asked Thad.

"No, he is not—that is—not in."

"Zen, perhaps hees seestaire, Madame Gazippe, eez in?"

"No, she ain't in, either," replied the dwarf, doggedly.

Thad was at the end of his tether.

He had no reason to doubt the fellow's word, because, after what had occurred in the afternoon, it was the most natural thing in the world that she should be away from home.

So he had nothing to do but turn about and go out again, which he did without much ceremony.

As he turned up the street the detective's thoughts were somewhat bitter, and he was inclined to rail at fortune.

In the whole course of his career as a detective he had never met with quite such ill luck as he had in this particular case.

Again and again the words of the inspector about it being a simple case came to him, and he was inclined to indulge in a sarcastic smile when he compared the case as he had really found it with what Byrnes had imagined it was.

At the corner of the street he stopped in to get a cigar, and when he emerged from the cigar store, he stood for some time, puffing his cigar, completely lost in reverie.

Mechanically he watched the passing pedestrians, but if he gave any individual face a thought, it was merely to weave it into the woof of his dream.

Hundreds of people hurried by, sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs, and sometimes in groups of several.

Some were silent and apparently as contemplative as himself: while others were laughing or engaged in animated discussion.

Thus the tide of humanity flowed by, and the detective, lost in his own reflections, neither saw nor heard them.

They might have been wooden marionettes for all the impression they made upon him.

Finally, however, he was partially aroused from his reverie by the consciousness of some one standing before him with outstretched hand, asking for charity.

Thad collected his thoughts enough to cast a glance at the mendicant, and he was so impressed with his misery that it gave him a kind of shock.

Instinctively, and without realizing what he was doing, the detective thrust his hand into his pocket, and pulling out all it contained, emptied it into the beggar's outstretched hand.

The action startled the fellow.

Thad had given him several dollars, which happened to be in loose change in his pocket.

But Thad took no heed of what he had done, until the beggar remarked:

"Thank you! God bless you! You'd better keep the keys, hadn't you, boss?"

Thad awoke to a realization then of what he had done, and saw that he had given the fellow his keys, penknife and several other trinkets, along with all the silver he had.

At the same time he became conscious of a woman passing with a little girl.

The little girl had paused to gaze up at the novel spectacle of a man giving so much money to a mendicant, and Thad could not

help hearing the strident voice of the woman ordering the child to "come along!"

And then something flashed upon him, that gave him a real start.

The little girl was Juliette and the woman was her mother.

For an instant Thad was too much dazed to fully realize that what he had seen was not a part of his dream.

But he was soon wide awake to the situation, and put after them.

They were coming away from the direction of the woman's home, and consequently must have been there at the time the detective was.

On they went toward Broadway, and Thad kept them in sight without allowing them to see that he was following them.

The little girl did not appear to go along with very good grace, and the mother kept scolding and shaking her to urge her along.

Finally they reached Broadway and stopped on the corner.

"Waiting for a car," mused Thad.

And at once looked about for a cab in which to follow if they took a car.

He had no trouble in finding one, and made provisional arrangement with the driver to take him wherever the woman and child should go, if they took a car.

He had not long to wait, for he had scarcely more than completed his bargain with the cabby, when a car came bowling down the street and the woman hailed it.

"Down-town," announced the detective, climbing into the cab. "Keep that car in sight, will you, driver?" he continued, pointing to the car which the woman and little girl were boarding at that moment.

"Yep," replied the driver, and climbed up behind.

The car started and the cab put after it.

It reminded Thad of his pursuit of the dwarf and the little woman.

Indeed, he began to conclude that these were heading for the same place to which he had dogged the other pair, as they continued on and on down Broadway.

But what could these people—this woman, bad as she undoubtedly was, and her innocent child, want at the Tombs?

Surely they had no relatives confined in this dismal abode; and if they had, they could not have access to them at that hour of the night.

On went the car, however, and as Thad, seated in the cab, watched the receding car, he became more and more impressed with the belief that the mother and daughter were on their way to the dingy prison.

And when, a few minutes later, the car stopped at Franklin street, and he saw them alight and start east, what he had surmised became a fact.

He leaped from the cab and started in pursuit, keeping in the shadows, of course, and as he watched the wretched woman dragging the innocent child along, a sense of pity appealed to him.

He remembered at that moment the woman at her best, in her gentle, suppliant mood, and the little child at her sweetest, when she asked to be allowed to kiss him.

And a horrible thought crossed his mind. He remembered the orders he had given to keep a guard outside the prison, with instructions to arrest any one seen prowling about the Centre street side.

Horrors! The woman and her child would be locked in that dismal place!

On the impulse of the moment, Thad was on the point of overtaking the woman and warning her of her peril.

But upon mature reflection, he decided to let her alone.

If she was going there for any evil purpose, it was only right that she should be arrested, and he would intercede in favor of the child and take her with him.

In the mean time the woman had pressed on and was now passing the Elm street corner of the Tombs.

To avoid observation, Thad ran up Elm to Leonard, and down Leonard to Centre street, before the two females had rounded the opposite corner of the prison.

The guard was posted at Thad's corner, and a word whispered to him apprised him not only of Thad's identity, but of what was in the wind.

A moment later the woman and child made their appearance around the corner,

and started up Centre street toward where Thad and the patrolman stood.

Arriving at the grate where the dwarf had dropped the bread-ball down, the woman paused and glanced cautiously about. Seeing no one, she stooped down and put her face close to the grate.

Whether she made any signal or not, or dropped anything down, neither Thad nor the policeman could tell, but a moment later she arose, and grasping the child's hand started to go.

Just then the policeman stepped up to her and placed her under arrest.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRESH REVELATIONS.

THE woman was so astonished at the appearance of the policeman that she could not speak for a moment.

But when, a moment later, she collected her senses, she affected the "injured innocent."

"What do you mean, sir?" she demanded, imperiously.

"You, dat's all," was the blunt rejoinder of Patrolman Riley.

"What for?" she asked, indignantly.

"Now, look hiar, missus, dey ain't no use o' dat game hiar. W'at was you doin' at dat grate, say?"

"Nothing at all, I assure you," she replied, beginning to come down a little.

"Nuthin' at all, eh? Say, folks don't gen'ally come round de lock-up dis time o' night 'less dey has bizness. See?"

"But I assure you—"

"Dat's all right, missus. W'at was ye pipin' dat grate fer?"

"If you will allow me, I can explain the whole matter," she said, in an innocent tone.

"Wal?"

"I was coming along with my little girl, and she wanted to know, childlike, what those grates were for. I tried to explain it to her, and then she asked me if you could look down into the prison, and not knowing myself, I stooped down to ascertain. Of course it was all dark below and I could see nothing. You could know, sir, that I am a lady, and would be guilty of nothing wrong."

"Shure," responded Riley, sarcastically. "We've got a whole community of ladies just like ye down dere in de dark. O' course your fairy story's a good one, but it don't go down in dis quarter, 'cause I happen to be on ter ye. Come on."

With that he took her by the arm and started to lead her around to the Franklin street entrance, but she made a fierce resistance, kicked, fought and screamed, so that he had to call another policeman to his assistance.

They finally managed to get her down, however, and locked her into the woman's section.

Juliette, who was nearly frightened out of her wits, was allowed to remain in the sergeant's office to await Thad, who had notified the sergeant that he desired to take her.

In the mean time while this was going on, the detective was not idle.

The moment the woman arose from the grate, and he concluded, therefore, that she had dropped something down to the prisoner below, Thad hurried round to the entrance and notified the sergeant of what had occurred.

The sergeant at once accompanied him to the cell occupied by the ruffian whom Thad had examined.

As it was still early, the prisoner had not yet retired, and was sitting on the side of his cot, smoking.

The moment the two officers approached the gate to the cell, they observed that the prisoner was idly rolling something between his fingers, and as soon as he caught sight of the officers he called out to the sergeant that he wanted to see him.

"What is it?" asked the sergeant.

"Look at this," said the prisoner, approaching the bars and holding something out in his palm.

The officers took it, and at once saw that it was a pellet of bread, similar in size and shape to the one Thad had found stuck up in the rear of the wall.

"Where did you get this?" demanded the sergeant.

"Some one dropped it t'rough de grate," replied Sliney.

"What is it, anyway?" asked the officer.

"I gives it up."

"You don't mean to tell me that you know nothing about it?"

"If I did, d'ye s'pose I'd 'a' called ye an' give it to ye?"

This was sound logic, and the sergeant had no reply to it, so he remained silent.

"Open the ball and see what is inside," suggested Thad.

This was done, and as Thad expected, a piece of tissue paper, about four inches square, was found inside.

Like the former one, it contained nothing but a lot of figures.

The sergeant looked at it earnestly for some time, and then handing it to the detective, remarked:

"Some guy, I guess."

"I guess not," said Thad.

"What else can it be?" A lot of meaningless figures is all that I can see."

"Perhaps. But you will be surprised when I get through with it to find that those figures tell a story."

"You don't say? A cipher letter, eh?"

"Yes."

With that Thad put the document into his pocket.

"Don't you think you had better question this fellow in regard to it?" queried the sergeant.

"No. It will be of no use. But I am going to make a request of you."

"What is that?"

"I am going to ask you to allow me to rescue this fellow."

This conversation took place as they walked away from the cell, and beyond the hearing of the prisoner.

"What do you mean?" inquired the sergeant in astonishment.

"I mean that I want you to allow me to come in here in the disguise of his pal and assist him to escape. I will be responsible for him, and guarantee that he won't get away."

"That is sufficient, Mr. Burr, and I am perfectly willing to grant your request, but I should like to ask you, if it is a fair question, what your object is."

"I will tell you. My opinion is that this fellow is somebody else than what he pretends, and after my examination of him I am satisfied that it will be impossible to discover who he is as long as he remains in prison."

"I can't see what difference that makes. Nine crooks out of ten travel under *aliases*, and are sometimes hanged under them. What difference does it make what his name or *alias* is, so long as you prove that he committed the crime?"

"All the difference in the world, in this case. In the first place I do not believe he is any more guilty of the crime to which he has confessed than you or I."

"You don't?"

"Not a bit of it."

"What could be his motive in confessing to a crime which he did not commit?"

"There is just this point," said Thad, earnestly. "If he were the low, vulgar villain that he pretends to be, and had committed this crime for money, as he claims, do you imagine he would voluntarily confess to it?"

"It doesn't look plausible," rejoined the sergeant reflectively. "Still, that does not explain his motive."

"No, but it goes this far toward it. If he is not the vulgar scoundrel he pretends to be, but some person of rank and intelligence, as my theory has it, he is the same heroic fellow suffering martyrdom for a dear, but erring friend. What do you think of the theory?"

"Very pretty as a theory, but I'm afraid it won't stand daylight in these degenerate days of selfishness. It would make a pretty story for the days of knight-errantry but it won't go in these days of electricity and stock-jobbing. If you had told me that he was the victim of somebody's machinations, I might have swallowed your theory, old man, but poetry and heroism don't thrive worth a cent in this atmosphere."

"Very well, I shall not urge my claim. It is at best but a theory; but I have implicit faith in it, and desire to test it."

"So you shall, my boy; and I shall watch the result with interest."

"Mingled with amusement, of course," added the detective.

"Yes, some amusement."

"All right. But don't forget to prepare yourself for a surprise."

"Oh, of course," laughed the sergeant. "By the way, when do you want to carry your design into execution?"

"Let me see, when will be the best time?"

"Day or night?"

"Either."

"Well, the best time in the whole twenty-four hours, the time when there are the fewest about, the prison is the quietest, is during the hour before supper—that is, six o'clock. More prisoners are rescued at that time than any other, and if the fellow is a genuine crook, he will consider it perfectly natural that he should be rescued at that time of day."

"Good. That time will suit me admirably, as it will give me a chance to shadow him, and at the same time it will not be too late for him to seek his friends."

"Ah, that is your proposed method, is it?"

"Certainly. How else is it possible to identify a man, except by his friends?"

"I see."

"You see," continued Thad, "I have the address of the real Buck Sliney, and if this fellow goes there when he is liberated, the jig is up. My theory is exploded. But if, on the other hand, he makes his way to some other place, the house, for instance, of some respectable person, then my theory is sound, and I have won the game."

"Yes," said the sergeant, reflectively.

"There is one more request I want to make of you, sergeant."

"What is that?"

"I want to have a talk with this fellow's pal in order to study his voice, appearance and peculiarities."

"All right. Hold on," exclaimed the sergeant suddenly. "You don't mean the chap that resembles this one?"

"No, the fellow Hank Mellon."

"Because, the fellow that looks like this one was acquitted after the preliminary examination."

"Yes, I know, he had nothing to do with the murder. He was simply trying to work some dodge, in connection with another rascal, to get a reward."

Thad then went back and entered the cell in which Mellon was confined.

Under the pretense of desiring to get some facts in the fellow's life to be used in a story he won the ruffian's confidence to such an extent that he threw off all restraint and exhibited himself in his true character.

After nearly an hour in the villain's society, Thad came forth ready to portray him to the life.

Juliette had succumbed to fatigue when Thad returned to the sergeant's office, and was sound asleep on a lounge.

She looked wonderingly at the detective when he awoke her, but when he explained who he was, she was delighted.

The child threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"I like you better now," she said. "You look a little like my papa—Mr. Gazippe—I mean, and I'll call you papa."

"I'm delighted to hear it," returned Thad, laughing. "But, come, my child, let us go."

"Am I going with you?" she cried, in delight.

"Yes."

"To your house?"

"Certainly."

"And mamma—"

"She is all right."

"Won't she try to take me again?"

"Not at present."

"But some time, eh?"

"Not unless you want her to."

"Well, I don't."

"Why?"

"I don't like her."

"Doesn't she treat you well?"

"No, sir. Besides she wants to give me to an old man who lives in California."

Thad was forced to laugh at this.

He was the old man from California.

"Well, my child, we won't let either your mamma or the old man from California take you."

"I'm so glad," she cried.

When they reached Broadway Thad called a cab and had himself and the child driven to his lodgings on Thirteenth street.

"Am I not going to your house?" asked Juliette, anxiously.

"Not at present, my child," he replied.

"You will be safer here until matters get settled."

"Very well," she said, resignedly. "Just so mamma or the old man from California don't get me."

"There is no danger while you are here, my child, while there might be at the house."

Thad ordered up their supper and the two friends sat down to the table, as happy a couple as ever partook of a king's banquet.

They chatted along merrily on various topics for some time, and finally the conversation flagged.

Juliette was silent and thoughtful for a good while, and then suddenly looking up, she said:

"Mr. Burr?"

"Yes, Juliette?"

"I want to tell you something."

"Very well, go on."

"You won't ever tell anybody!"

"No, if you don't wish me to."

"Well, my mamma—that is, Mrs. Gazippe—told me to-day that—"

"What?"

"You won't tell anybody?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, she told me that I wasn't her daughter."

"Was she joking, or did she say it by way of reproving you?"

"Neither one."

"What did she mean, then?"

"That I am really and truly not her child."

"Did she really mean it, do you think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whose child did she say you was?"

"She didn't say; but she said that you would probably find my mamma and papa, too, before you got through."

"I certainly will if they are to be found, my child. But didn't she tell you who your papa is?"

"No, sir. But she told me where he is."

"Where?"

"In jail."

"In jail?" exclaimed Thad, in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"What jail?"

"The jail where we went, and where they took her and locked her up."

"The Tombs?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it she threw down through the grate?"

"I don't know, sir. Something about me, though, I know."

"We shall soon see," said Thad, pulling the cipher letter from his pocket.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE STORY.

THAD bent partially over the cipher letter for a long time.

Figure after figure was interpreted, and took its place as a word or part of word, and these words following each other, formulated intelligent sentences.

And Thad was delighted to see that it was in the English language.

Finally the task was completed, and this is what it was:

"If your escape to-morrow night is successful, come directly to 265. The child will be there. You had better take her and fly the country before any more revelations are made. If your attempted rescue should prove a failure, I shall do as you suggested, send her away to some place. So far no one suspects the other. But the suspense is terrible. Keep up your courage and make a good fight."

This was a genuine surprise.

"So they were going to attempt a real earnest rescue, were they?" mused Thad.

"Well, that is fortunate. The fellow will be expecting it, and will therefore act naturally. I wonder if he got a chance to read the document before we interrupted him. Because if he hasn't, he won't know what to do. However, I'll go ahead and trust to luck."

"What is it, papa?" inquired the girl.

The child's voice, and especially calling him papa, startled the detective.

At that moment he was so deeply absorbed as to lose all consciousness of his surroundings.

"Why, my child, this note is evidently addressed to your real papa, who is in prison, and the writer expects that your papa will escape to-morrow night, and that if he does, the writer wants him to come to 265—"

"That's our number on Twentieth street," interposed the child.

"Well, they want him to go there, where the writer says your papa will find you, and take you away."

"But he won't find me there, will he, sir?"

"I guess not."

"Because if my papa is anything like my mamma, I don't want to go with him; and I don't think he can be very nice, or he wouldn't be in prison, do you, sir?"

"You can't tell, my child. Good people sometimes get into prison."

"I thought prisons were only for bad people," she cried, anxiously.

"So they are, but sometimes good ones have the misfortune to get in, too."

"How?"

"Various ways. Usually through the fault of some bad person."

They conversed cheerily until a late hour, and finally retired.

Thad, having little sleep the night previous, soon fell into a sound slumber from which he did not awake till morning, and then by the merry voice of Juliette singing.

The detective arose directly and dressed himself, and then ordered their breakfast sent up from below.

When they were seated at the table, Thad said:

"I have a good deal to do to-day Juliette, and shall be away most of the time. I presume you can manage to amuse yourself here."

"Oh, yes, sir," she answered cheerily.

"There is one thing you must look out for, and that is allowing strangers in. Beware especially of the dwarf."

"Yes, sir, I will. I don't like that dwarf. He isn't handsome, is he?"

"Well, scarcely."

"He is uglier than you are, sir, with your natural face."

"Do you think so?" asked Thad, laughing.

"A great deal."

"That is tough on the dwarf, Juliette."

"I know, sir, but it is true."

As soon as breakfast was over the detective took his leave of Juliette and made his way to the studio of the late artist.

His object was to make a more thorough examination of the artist's papers.

After a long and patient search he came across a large envelope containing what appeared to be legal documents.

On opening the envelope Thad found several sheets of parchment filled with writing. But to his chagrin the writing was in the Italian language.

"Never mind," he reflected, putting the document into his pocket, "I will call upon my lawyer friend, and see if there is anything in these papers that will cause him to stab me."

Having a little time on his hands, Thad concluded then to fulfill his promise to Miss Carbonetti of informing her as soon as he should hear anything of Miss Petero.

He therefore mounted the two additional pair of stairs to their flat.

A tap at the door brought the young lady herself to open it.

She fairly screeched with joy when she saw him.

"I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Burr," she exclaimed. "Come right in."

"Thank you, Miss Carbonetti," she responded. "I have very little time. In fact, I just dropped in to tell you that I have found Miss Petero."

"Sh-s-sh!" she exclaimed, placing her finger on her lip warningly, and pointing in the direction of the sitting-room. "She is there."

This was a surprise for Thad.

"You don't tell me?" he whispered.

"Yes, I do."

"Then my mission is at an end."

"Not at all. Come in."

"I do not think it would be pleasant."

"Why?"

"I have discovered some things about the

little lady that are nothing to her credit, and I cannot treat her as a lady."

"But she wants to see you."

"Did she say so?"

"Yes, sir. She told me that if I saw you to say to you that she could tell you the rest of her story now."

"In that case I will go in."

At that he walked into the sitting-room. Miss Petero and Mrs. Carbonetti were both there.

The little lady arose and courtesied politely and to Thad's surprise showed no sign of embarrassment.

After passing the time of day, with the old lady, the detective turned his attention to the little woman.

"You wanted to see me, I believe," he remarked.

"Yes, sir. There is a portion of my story which I told you the other evening I must keep secret for a while."

"I remember."

"Well, the time has come now when I not only can tell it, but I feel it my duty to myself and others to speak out."

"Proceed, Miss Petero!"

"To begin where I quit off, I must tell you the cause of Lucretia Chester's jealousy."

"Ten years ago I was a handsomer woman than I am to-day."

"I shouldn't wonder," assented Thad.

"Indeed, I was considered pretty," the little lady continued. "I was in Italy then. One day, while stopping at my father's summer resort in the Apennines, I met a very handsome and gallant gentleman. He was of noble birth, and knowing that I came of good family, he pretended to become deeply attached to me, and I confess to a strong regard for him."

"For several weeks we were together almost constantly, and I naturally expected an offer of marriage, but it never came to that, although he openly professed his love for me."

"Finally he departed for his home in Florence, and before going he made me a present of a pair of very peculiar and valuable ear-rings."

"The ones which you wore when Chester assaulted you and tore one from your ear?" interposed the detective.

"Yes. Well, at the end of the season we, my family, returned to Florence, where we lived."

"I had not heard from my cavalier since his departure."

"One day, while visiting one of the art galleries, I was surprised and delighted to meet him. But my delight was transitory."

"Scarcely had we spoken when he was joined by a lady, who had been in another part of the gallery, and whom he introduced as his wife."

"The lady was very beautiful, I noticed, but she gave me a look of malignance that I shall never forget."

"A few days after, I received a note from her saying that if I did not return the ear-rings which her husband had given me, she would give me trouble. I paid no attention to the threat, and I heard no more of either her or her husband."

"Time wore on, and I was married to the young artist, Vincenzo Gazippe. We lived happily for two years, and then my husband became dissatisfied and began to rove about the world."

"I heard from him tolerably regularly for awhile, but finally he ceased to write and I lost all trace of him."

"At last, however, I heard that he was in the United States, and I was determined to follow him. In the mean time he had spent nearly all my fortune, but I managed to scrape enough together to get to this country, and arrived here a little over six months ago, nearly penniless."

"And what was worse, I found that my husband had another wife. She was in the studio at the time I called, on my arrival, and when the situation was explained to me I fainted, and was for a long time on the verge of insanity."

"Did you not have him arrested for bigamy?" asked Thad.

"No. I found that some one had written to him that I had been disloyal to him and he considered himself divorced."

"Who was it that wrote to him about your infidelity?"

"Lucretia Chester."

"And it was her husband who had made love to you in the Apennines, was it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"Well, as you know, I stopped with Mrs. Carbonetti for some time after my arrival, and I had not been here long before Lucretia discovered it, and she was bent upon having revenge."

"One day, while Mrs. Carbonetti was out, she went into the studio and, by some means or other, induced my husband to give her the key to the door of the flat here. How she managed to do it I do not know, but she had great influence over him."

"Once in possession of the key, she came into the room where I was before I knew that she was on this side of the water. After reviling me as you know she is capable of doing, she sprung at me like a tigress and tore the ring from my ear, saying that she intended to wear it the balance of her life as a token of revenge, as a savage wears his vanquished enemy's scalp at his belt."

"But you told me it was Chester who committed the outrage," interrupted Thad.

"I will explain that. As soon as he discovered what his wife had done, he came to me and begged me not to prosecute her, and to tell the world that he was the criminal. For a long time I did not give his name, but simply a description of him. In fact, I have not given you his right name yet."

"What is his right name?"

"Julio Lavardo."

Thad almost lost his breath.

"Then Julio Lavardo and Harold Chester are one and the same, are they?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Marie Gazippe is his sister?"

"Yes."

"One thing more," continued the detective. "How did you come to go to live with these people after they had treated you so shamefully?"

"For two reasons. First, I was homeless, and second, those were the only terms upon which she would agree to cease her persecution of me."

"And has she?"

"Yes; since I have been in the house I couldn't ask to be more kindly treated. The only drawback was the fact of being a menial—a lady's maid; but as I had nothing, and was compelled to earn my living anyway, it did not make much difference."

"There is another point I would like to ask you, Miss Petero."

"What is that?"

"I noticed on the two occasions upon which I called, that Mrs. Chester, or Mrs. Lavardo, wore the one earring."

"Yes, sir, she always wears it."

"Have you the mate to it yet?"

Thad thought he had her here.

"No, sir."

"Where is it?"

"She has it."

"Why does she not wear both?"

"I will explain. Some time ago she lost the earring that she had torn from my ear, and to conceal the fact from her husband, and at the same time still wear the trophy of her revenge, she compelled me to give her the other one."

"Do you know where she lost it?"

"You told me, I believe, that you found it in the studio."

"So I did. Did she lose it there?"

"I do not know."

"Was she on bad terms with your husband?"

"On the contrary, she was fascinated with him," answered the little lady, blushing.

"And still she might not have been on good terms with him. How did he regard her?"

"That I cannot tell. But I do not imagine that he cared much for her."

"You never heard her express any desire to be avenged on him for anything?"

"No, sir. But she might have desired it ever so much and said nothing about it. She is a woman that keeps her own secrets."

"How is it that, having kept her secret so long, you reveal it now, Miss Petero?"

"Because before this time to-morrow morning Lucretia Lavardo will be beyond the dark river."

"What do you mean?"

"She will be dead."

"Then she is ill?"

"Very ill."

There was a strange light in the little woman's eye as she said this, and Thad did not like the appearance of it. But he made no comment on it, and let it pass.

"Miss Petero," he resumed, "I chanced to see you the other night when you dropped the bread-ball into the cell at the Tombs. Who is in that cell?"

Without the least appearance of confusion she replied:

"Buck Sliney."

Thad was floored.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONFLICTING THEORIES.

LITTLE Miss Petero's story set Thad to thinking as he walked away from the Carbonettis.

If it was true, and there was little reason to doubt it, it put an entirely new phase upon matters as they originally appeared.

Still, not very different from his own latest theory, after all.

One thing appeared to be clear, and that was, that whoever dropped the ear-ring in the studio must have been the murderer.

And just here a thought occurred to the detective.

He had forgotten a very important detail in his cross-examination of Miss Petero, so he immediately turned back.

Miss Carbonetti was surprised at his return; but when he explained that he wanted to see Miss Petero again, she led him into the little sitting-room.

The little lady met him with her usual complaisance.

"There is one point I neglected to mention in the course of our conversation, Miss Petero," he explained. "The interest of your own story, perhaps, had the effect of driving it out of my mind."

"What is that, Mr. Burr?" she inquired.

"Were you at the Chester mansion on the 17th of October?"

"The 17th of October? Let me see—"

"That was the day on which your husband was murdered."

"Oh, yes; I remember now. Yes, I was there."

"About noon?"

"Yes, sir; exactly at noon."

"Do you recall whether Mr. and Mrs. Chester were both there at that time, or not?"

"Mrs. Chester was there, but he was not."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"What circumstance recalls it?"

"Why, just at noon, or possibly a few minutes after, I had just sat down to lunch when Lucretia came in in a great flurry and, pointing to the clock, exclaimed: 'Bianca, do you see the time?'"

"What did she mean by that?"

"That I should be lunching at that hour, when we were usually out driving by twelve or half-past twelve."

"And she had not been out?"

"No, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Because she spoke of *ennui* from staying in the house so late; besides, she was not dressed and could not dress without my assistance."

"And you are sure that it was not later than twelve o'clock, noon?"

"Not more than ten minutes later."

Then turning to Miss Carbonetti, he asked:

"Do you remember the exact time you left the studio on the day of the murder?"

"Yes, sir. It was exactly ten minutes past twelve," she replied.

"How do you know?"

"I was in the habit of stepping from the dais the instant the Swiss cuckoo clock in the studio struck, and knowing my peculiarity, he called out at the first stroke of the clock: 'One minute, Miss Carbonetti; just a minute.' He had some particular lines to put in, I suppose. I remember that I was very hungry, having had an early breakfast, and the 'one minute' seemed an hour to me. So, when he finally released me, I glanced at the clock and saw that it was ten minutes past twelve."

"Did you come directly up-stairs?"

"No, sir; I stopped for a moment in the dressing-room to throw on a robe."

"And while you were in there you heard the report of the pistol?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long do you think you were actually in the dressing-room?"

"I do not think it could have exceeded two minutes."

"And there was no one in the studio when you left?"

"No, sir."

"You are positive about this?"

"Positive."

"Did you stop to wash, or in any way make your toilet?"

"No, sir."

"Had you used water from the pitcher in the dressing-room recently?"

"Yes, sir, that morning."

"And nobody had been in the dressing-room that day except yourself?"

"No, sir."

"About what time was it that you used water out of the pitcher that morning?"

"A few minutes after nine."

"How did it happen?"

"I had just disrobed to enter the studio, and as I took the mantle I always threw around me while passing back and forth, from its nail, I knocked down a little soot upon my hand, so I turned to the wash-stand, poured some water into the bowl and washed my hands."

"Did you notice any scraps of paper or card in the pitcher when you poured the water from it?"

"No, sir. I am positive there were none there, then."

"Did you ever use water from the pitcher after that day?"

"No, sir."

"Then it seems likely that the scraps of card which I found in the pitcher were dropped in on the day of the murder, as nobody but yourself has been in the room since."

"They must have been," assented Miss Carbonetti, "for there has been nobody in the room, as you say, since the murder, except the police who came in on the same day."

"And it isn't likely that they dropped them in."

"No, sir."

"I believe you told me before that you had no idea whom the card was intended for?"

"Yes, sir. I have no idea."

"Perhaps Miss Petero might know something," suggested Thad, turning to the little woman.

"What is that, sir?"

"When I made my first examination of the studio," explained the detective, "I found the shreds of a mutilated card in the water-pitcher in the dressing-room, containing some writing, which being in Italian I had to have translated. When this was done, it read as follows:

Here he drew the transcription from his pocket, and read:

"Why hesitate any longer, my angel? You are not happy with him, and would be with me. My heart, my fortune, everything is yours, and without you life is not worth a rush. You *must* be mine, or somebody will have to die! Who shall it be?"

The little woman's face had assumed a troubled expression.

She did not reply at once, however, not in fact, until the detective repeated his query:

"Do you know anything about that?"

"I am afraid I do," she replied.

"To whom do you imagine that was addressed, Miss Petero?"

"To Lucretia Chester, I think."

"And who is it from?"

"My late husband, I imagine."

"And yet you said awhile ago that your husband did not regard Mrs. Chester very highly."

"So I always believed."

"How do you account for his writing such a thing as that, then?"

"I do not pretend to say."

"Why do you think it was written by him and intended for her?"

"I will tell you: A few days before the murder I overheard Chester and his wife in an angry discussion. He had accused her of unfaithfulness, as well as I could understand, and she indignantly denied the allegation. Then to prove his charge, he drew a card

from his pocket and read, as near as I can recollect, an Italian version of what you have just read."

"Where had he got the card?"

"I do not know."

"That explains how it might have been written to her, Miss Petero," said Thad. "But, why do you think it was written by the artist?"

"The style of expression, for one thing, and the fact that it was found in the studio, for another."

"Perhaps we can establish that fact still more clearly," remarked Thad, taking out his pocketbook and drawing from it the scraps of card which he had rescued from the pitcher. Placing the bits of card-board upon the center-table, the detective held his microscope over the restored card, and said:

"Please examine that writing and see if you recognize it, Miss Petero."

She bent over the glass for some moments, and finally raising up, shook her head.

"No, sir," she declared, "I do not recognize it. At least, it is not the writing of my late husband, I am sure of that."

Thad was disconcerted again.

"Then your theory that he wrote the card is exploded."

"So it seems," replied the little woman, "and yet I cannot imagine who else it could have been."

"Nevertheless, the theory will not hold."

"Perhaps."

"Now, Miss Petero, you spoke awhile ago of Mrs. Chester compelling you to give her the other ear-ring. Do you remember the date upon which she made this demand?"

"Yes, sir. It was the night following the murder."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

This looked very much like a clue, and Thad was elated.

Turning now to Miss Carbonetti, he inquired:

"Who swept the studio out, Miss Carbonetti?"

The young lady laughed.

"That is rather a difficult question to answer," she replied.

"Why so?"

"It was so seldom swept. Never when there was a new picture on the easel."

"Then you are sure that the place was not swept on the day the murder was committed?"

"Let me see. Yes, I am sure that it was not swept on that day, but come to think of it, it was swept out the day before."

"How do you remember this?"

"Because Mr. Gazippe had made the first drawing for the picture of Calypso the day before, and before he had touched a brush to the canvas he called the dwarf and had him sweep the studio out, thoroughly."

"That included the dais upon which you stood, of course."

"Yes, sir."

"The ear-ring could not have been there then, that is clear, for that fellow would never overlook a diamond with those eyes of his."

"I should imagine not."

"It is evident, then, that both the diamond and the card were left in the studio on the day of the murder."

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Miss Carbonetti.

"And were left there by the same person that committed the murder."

"I shouldn't wonder—if he was murdered."

"What! you do not still adhere to your theory of suicide, do you?"

"I do."

"In the face of all the evidence?"

"All the evidence proves to me nothing but suicide."

"How so?"

"Why according to that letter, supposing the artist wrote it, he declares that somebody must die, and supplements it by asking who it shall be."

"Well?"

"Well, my opinion is that, being disappointed in his wish, he solved the problem by killing himself."

"It would be curious, and not very flattering to me, Miss Carbonetti, if your theory should prove to be the correct one."

"And I believe it will so prove."

"However, let me get on with my theory."

It is evident that if, as you say, Miss Petero, Mrs. Chester was at home at ten minutes past twelve, she could not have been at the studio at the time the murder was committed, which, according to Miss Carbonetti, must have occurred at about the same time, that is, ten or twelve minutes past twelve.

"That establishes an unquestionable *alibi* for Mrs. Chester."

"As to Mr. Chester, the case is different."

"He was not at home at that time and, unless he can prove where he was, it is reasonable, under the circumstances, to believe that he might have been at the studio."

"Now, the question arises, how came the diamond ear-ring on the dais?"

Neither one of the ladies had any comment, so the detective continued:

"It is hardly to be supposed that Chester had the ear-ring. There is no reason why he should have had it. It would be natural, on the other hand, for her to have the ear-ring, and to have lost it in a moment of great excitement. It is not possible that he could have stolen his wife's jewel and dropped it there for the purpose of identifying her with the murder, for we have already seen that he has assumed the responsibility and stigma of her crimes on other occasions."

"Yes," interposed Miss Carbonetti; "but might not he have changed his tactics? Miss Petero says that he had accused his wife of infidelity. Who knows but that he not only murdered her lover, or supposed lover, but left this clue to convict her to avenge himself, in a fit of jealous rage?"

"You are some on theories, Miss Carbonetti," said Thad, laughing. "You should have been a detective."

"I think I will try it," she replied, with a smile.

"The only trouble with your theory," continued the detective, "is that, inasmuch as it doesn't appear that Gazippe wrote the card, therefore there is no incentive, no motive, so far as known, for Chester to have committed the murder."

The women were silent, and Thad also became thoughtful.

After the lapse of a few minutes, however, Thad, having digested the subject thoroughly in his mind, and concluding that there was nothing more to learn in this direction, arose to go.

As he opened the door and turned to bid adieu to the ladies, he was surprised to see that the little lady had got her hat on and was prepared to accompany him.

To his look of inquiry she replied:

"I will go down to the studio with you. I want to see if we can find a paper there of my husband's, which will throw some light upon the subject, I think."

And without another word she went along with him down to the studio.

She silently busied herself among the late artist's papers for some time, and at length appeared to be disappointed in not finding what she sought.

An idea occurred to the detective just then.

Drawing the document which he had found in the desk from his pocket, he asked:

"Is this what you are looking for?"

She took the envelope, and, drawing the paper from it, opened it.

As soon as she glanced at the heading she exclaimed:

"Yes, this is it. I was afraid it was lost."

CHAPTER XXIV

A STRIKING LIKENESS.

"I HOPE you can make more out of the document than I can," remarked Thad, when he saw the little lady had finished reading it. "It is all Greek to me, or what is quite as bad, Italian."

"It is quite intelligible to me," rejoined Miss Petero. "Italian is my mother tongue."

"So I should suppose; but you speak excellent English."

"That is owing to my associating with English people so much in the old country."

"I see."

"My father's business took him frequently to England, and many of the visitors at our house were English-speaking people."

"Well, Miss Petero, would you mind making a translation of this document for me?"

"Certainly not."

"Thank you. When can you have it done?"

"Any time. This evening, if you like."

"I will have no time to call this evening," said Thad. "But some time to-morrow I will try to run in."

"You need not. If you can tell me what time you will be at your lodgings to-morrow, I will be there with it."

"Thank you, very much, Miss Petero. I will be there any time after noon."

"All right, sir. You may expect me by four, or five at the latest."

"That will do. Good-by."

"Good-by, sir."

It was now some time after noon, and Thad ran into a restaurant and got a lunch.

He then made his way to the corner of Avenue A and Eighth street, the tenement where Buck Sliney was supposed to live.

The tenement was one of those dirty, malodorous hives peculiar to the neighborhood, and it required a good stomach, as well as a strong nerve, to climb the filthy stairs.

Thad had both in an eminent degree, and proceeded at once to the top of the four flights of stairs.

Having arrived at that point, he knocked at the first door he came to.

A bedraggled and blear-eyed old woman came to the door.

"Is Buck Sliney in?" he asked.

The old hag, who, he noticed, was half-intoxicated, eyed him keenly for a moment, and then mumbled:

"No, he ain't. W'at do you want 'im fer?"

"I want him, and that is enough, old woman, and I think he is in."

"No, no, I swear be ain't," protested the hag. "Besides he's just got out and you can't have nuthin' ag'in' him yit."

"There is no charge against him," returned Thad, handing her a quarter. "But I want to see him on important business."

"Any'ing in it?" she asked, with a grin of complaisance, looking first at the coin in her hand and then at the detective.

"Yes, if he does my work right."

The old woman pushed the door open and pointed toward the back room, while she tottered down-stairs after a gin.

Thad went into the back room, where he found the ruffian lying across a tattered bed.

The detective saw at once that he was very drunk, but still able to talk tolerably well.

"W'at d'ye want o' me?" he muttered.

"Nothing that need cause you any alarm," replied Thad.

"Oh."

"I want you to do a little job for me, for which I will pay you well; but first I want you to answer a few questions truthfully."

The fellow pricked up his ears at the mention of money.

"W'at's de questions?" he queried.

"First of all, I want you to tell me the truth about your connection with the murder of the artist on Twenty-third street."

"No guff about this?"

"Certainly not."

"Won't run me in if I gives ye de straight tip, eh?"

"No."

"Wal, den, I didn't have nothin' ter do wid dat air job. See?"

"Who put you up to it?"

"De little sawed-off wid de mug."

"You mean the dwarf?"

"Yep."

"What was the lay?"

"W'y, ye see de little 'un t'ought dere was boodle in de racket. I was ter let him 'rest me an' give me up an' git the sugar. See?"

"I see."

"But it wasn't no go. De coves w'at was workin' de scent wouldn't divvy. He tumbled to our curves right off."

"Do you know Mellon?"

"Yep. He used ter be a pal o' mine. He's a squealer, dough, dat bloke."

"Well, do you know the fellow that resembles you, who was brought in to be examined the other day?"

"No, I don't know dat rooster. Say?"

"Well?"

"D'ye know w'at I t'ink?"

"No. What?"

"I t'ink dat cove's a sleeper."

"That is, he is not what he lets on to be, eh?"

"Yep."

"What makes you think so?"

"I'll tell ye. We was in de same coop fer a day er two, an' I noticed dat he et his soup out o' de side of his spoon like a dude."

"That is a sure indication that he is no tough, eh?"

"Dead shure."

"Well, I tell you what I want you to do for me. I am going to rescue that fellow to-night, and I want you to help me."

"Goin' to help ter bolt, eh?"

"Yes."

"Dangerous biz dat."

"No danger in this case. The warden is into it with me."

"Oh, I see. Some rich cove, eh, dat's shugered de whole lot?"

"That's it. Are you with me?"

"Shure."

"Very well. Be at the corner of Centre and Franklin streets at half-past five. Mellon will meet you there at that time."

"Then I ain't in it."

"Why?"

"Me an' Mellon don't corrode, see?"

"You will get along with this particular Mellon, I guess."

"Hunk, ain't it?"

"Yes. At least so you will think; but as a matter of fact, it will be myself made up to look like Mellon."

"Ah, I smoke ye now. Ye'r goin' ter come de sleuth racket on 'em air ye?"

"Yes."

"Dat's all right. I'll be on hand."

Thad then took his leave of the ruffian, and proceeded at once to his lodgings.

Juliette was delighted to see him, and ran up and kissed him.

"Have you been lonesome, my dear?" asked the detective.

"No, sir," she replied cheerfully.

"How have you passed the time?"

"Reading mostly. I love reading, and you have such nice books, all about detectives and horrible murders."

"I don't think those are the best books for little girls, Juliette."

"Why, sir?"

"They are not refined enough."

"Maybe not, but they make you shiver to read them, and I like that."

"You are a queer child," returned Thad, as he passed out into his dressing-room.

He then began the work of making up to resemble the villain Mellon.

His time was somewhat limited and he therefore worked rapidly, so that in half an hour he had completed one of the most difficult make-ups known to the detective, that of a smooth-faced ruffian of the lower order.

Where there is a beard, the task is nothing like so difficult, as that alone is disguise enough for ordinary purposes.

But when it comes to changing a smooth face so that your best friend won't recognize you, it requires the skill of an artist.

But the job was a success. So much so, that when Thad returned to the sitting-room, Juliette started with a scream of alarm at sight of him.

Thad soon reassured her, and when he told her that he was going to take her papa out of prison, the child was very happy.

"But, remember," she said, "if he is anything like my mamma, I sha'n't like him, and I won't go with him."

"Well, my child, I hope he is not like your mamma, at least the woman who has passed for such. Good-by."

"Good by, sir."

Thad then left the studio, and was soon on his way to the Tombs.

When he arrived at the Centre and Franklin street corner of the prison he found that Sliney had already arrived and was anxiously awaiting him.

The ruffian did not expect to see so perfect a likeness of his ex pal however. Indeed, he was loth to believe that it was not the identical man himself, and appeared to be laboring under the delusion that there was some conspiracy behind the affair looking to his own downfall.

In consequence, he eyed the new-comer suspiciously and his brow became clouded with a dark scowl.

Thad guessed what was going on in the fellow's mind, and concluded to humor the deception by a little acting.

Shuffling up to Sliney in true ruffian fashion, the detective demanded:

"Wot's a-eatin' of ye, pardner? Don't ye stag a fellah, say?"

At this Sliney gave him a supercilious glance, elevated his nose, and replied:

"Go on! I stags ye all right, see? But, I don't want no truck wid ye!"

"W'at! goin' back on an old chum like dat? Say, Sliney, you're a corker, you air."

At this the ruffian glared at him more savagely than ever.

"I told ye to mosey, didn't I?" he growled. "Now, I don't want no scrap wid you, Mellon, but if ye don't git a move on ye, I'll tump ye in de neck. See?"

"Who will?" demanded Thad, sidling up to him, and still keeping up the character.

"I will, see?"

"Who will ye tump in de neck, say?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Yep."

"You only t'ink ye will."

"No, I ain't t'inkin', I'll do it."

"Ye're dreamin', Buck. Yer couldn't tump a cockroach, you couldn't."

"Who, me?"

"Dat's w'at I yelped."

"Ye'r hollerin' too loud, you air."

"Am I?"

"Yes, ye air."

"Looker hiar, Sliney, if I can't do you wid me flippers tied, I'll eat dirt, see?"

"Ye can't do nuttin', you can't."

At that Thad suddenly grasped the fellow's arms and held them like a vise.

"Now w'at yer goin' ter do, say?" he demanded.

"Let up on me grips!" yelled Sliney. "Dat ain't no fair game. Jes' like ye, Mellon, take advantage of a feller. Let up, I tell ye!"

"Wal, if I don't, den w'at?"

"I'll see ye later, dat's all."

"Ye will, will ye?"

"Course I will. See?"

"An' have yer gun, I reckon."

"I ain't sayin' nuttin'."

"But I'm onter ye."

"Let up on me flippers, I say!"

At that moment a policeman, who had been attracted by the row, stalked up and laid his hand upon Thad's shoulder.

Thad turned, and seeing who it was, whispered a single word.

The patrolman smiled and sauntered on.

At the same time Thad released Sliney.

The latter stared at his late antagonist in amazement.

"Say, Hank, w'at yer bin doin', anyway?" he asked.

"W'y?"

"W'y, de grip ye've got. Yer didn't used ter have it."

"Oh, I belongs to an athletic club, now."

"I see. But w'at yer been doin' ter git so solid wid de cops?"

"Oh, that's all right, Sliney. I'm one of them, you know," replied Thad, in his natural voice and language.

Sliney stared in earnest now.

He could hardly credit his own senses.

"W'at!" he cried, as soon as he could get his breath. "Ye don't mean ter tell me dat ye ain't Hank Mellon?"

"Certainly I am not."

"An' ye've been givin' me guff all dis time?"

"Of course."

"Say, I've a good mind ter give ye one in de kisser fer luck."

"It would be rather unlucky for you if you did, old fellow."

"Wal, I don't know but it would, seein' w'at a grip ye've got."

"Well," said Thad, "it is time to begin work. You remain here, and I will go down and interview the prisoner."

"Yep, dat's de bes' way," rejoined the fellow, with a sense of relief. "I was kinder 'fraid ye'd want me ter poke me nose inside de checkers. I don't like dat. I allus feels as dough I ought ter stay dere w'en de doah closes behind me, and feels as if I was doin' de sneak w'en I smells de outside air."

"You've put in a good deal of time behind the bars, I presume, Sliney?"

"Have I? I'm fo'ty-five yeahs old next mont', an' I've passed more'n twenty on 'em in de lock-up, sometimes wid stripes and sometimes widout stripes."

"That's a career to be proud of, eh, Sliney?"

"Wal, I ain't de cove ter blow; but I will

say dat dere ain't six on de East side o' my age dat kin show no such record."

"You ought to have a medal."

"I ought, dat's a fact."

"Well, I'll be going now. You remain here, and if the patrolman has anything to say to you, orders you to move on or anything, tell him that Thad Burr stationed you here, and he won't molest you."

Thad then entered the prison at the Franklin street gate, procured the key to cell 45, and made his way back through the labyrinth of dingy corridors to the cell in which the mysterious prisoner was confined.

CHAPTER XXV.

A QUICK CHANGE.

THE prisoner was sitting upon the side of his cot, smoking in moody silence, and apparently absorbed in deep thought, when Thad approached the gate of the cell.

Even after the detective approached and put his face against the bars, the fellow did not raise his eyes from the floor.

Thad rapped on the bars with the keys, and the prisoner looked up indifferently, expecting, of course, to meet the deputy-warden.

When he saw the detective's apparently sodden face pressed against the bars, the prisoner's face took on a slight semblance of interest or curiosity, and he gazed more intently than was his wont at anything.

Thad beckoned for him to approach the gate.

The fellow scowled and turned his face in another direction.

And when Thad rapped on the bars with the keys a second time, the fellow refused to look up.

The detective then unlocked the door and threw it open.

Strangely enough the prisoner paid not the slightest heed to the action.

What did it mean?

Was he averse to being liberated, or did he imagine the gates were being opened only to lead him into worse confinement?

"I say, Sliney," said Thad, in a low voice, "you're a good one, you air."

The prisoner turned upon him with a contemptuous scowl.

"Don't ye wanter smell daylight, ole fellah?" continued Thad.

"Nope," was the curt response.

"Ye don't?"

"No, I don't."

This was a surprise.

What could be the fellow's idea in refusing to accept liberty when it was offered him?

"W'at's de reason ye don't?" asked Thad.

"Wal, I don't, an' dat's enough," retorted the prisoner.

"You're a fool, Buck Sliney!"

"Maybe I am."

"Do you know w'at dey'll do wid you if ye goes to trial?"

"Nope, an' I don't care."

"Dey'd hang ye! See?"

"How d'ye know?" demanded the prisoner, with a faint show of interest.

"How do I know?"

"Dat's w'at I said."

"I'll tell ye how I know. De dwarf has swore dat he seen me an' you kill de artist, an' den I got shaky an' confessed."

The prisoner looked at him in surprise.

"Confessed ter w'at?" he asked.

"To de murder of de artist," responded Thad, "an' implicated you."

The fellow sprung to his feet and glowered threateningly at the detective.

"W'at did ye want to do dat fer?" he fairly hissed.

"'Cause dey promised ter let me off if I'd squeal on you."

"But yer knowed dat ye lied."

"O' course I did!"

"W'at did yer do it fer?"

"Ter save me own neck. An' now I've come ter save yourn."

"An' I won't accept liberty f'om any sich a traitor as you!" hissed the prisoner. "Go!"

Thad was at the end of his resources, temporarily; but he soon hit upon a solution of the problem.

Turning upon his heel with well-feigned indignation, he muttered:

"All right, ole fellah. Ye won't take

liberty f'om me; but nobody can't say dat Hank Mellon didn't do de square t'ing by a pal."

With that Thad left the cell, and took good care to allow the prisoner to see that he did not lock the door.

He then glided along the corridor a short distance, to where there was an empty cell, which had been left unlocked on purpose, and went in.

From this cell, which was dark, he could watch every movement of the prisoner.

Scarcely had the detective got into his hiding-place, when he noticed a peculiar action on the part of the prisoner.

He first glanced up toward the grated window for an instant, and the next instant stooped and picked up something from the floor.

Thad could not discern what it was at first, but a moment later he could see that he was, without doubt, earnestly perusing a paper.

His brow grew clouded as he read, and he was evidently becoming greatly agitated.

What could it mean?

An instant later the prisoner approached the gate and peered out.

After surveying the corridor in each direction, as far as he could, he tried the grate, and finding that it was unlocked, he opened it cautiously and stepped out.

Then he paused and glanced cautiously about, to make sure that no one was in sight.

Having apparently satisfied himself on this point, the prisoner stole stealthily along the corridor toward the stairway leading to the floor above.

As soon as he had got far enough away so that Thad could venture out without danger of his noticing him, the detective started after him.

The prisoner continued along the corridor, occasionally pausing to glance about, and appeared surprised that he did not meet a guard.

Arriving at the stairway, the prisoner glided softly up them to the ground floor. Here he stopped and glanced about him.

From this point he could see the entrance, and to his utter surprise the warden who usually sits there, was absent.

The prisoner started cautiously toward the entrance, and by the time he had taken half a dozen steps the detective was at the top of the steps with his eye upon the fellow.

On went the escaped prisoner toward the door, glancing nervously about with each succeeding step, and wondering, apparently, why no one appeared to stay his progress.

The iron gate was reached, and after pausing to glance about once more, the prisoner glided up to the gate and tried the lock.

It yielded, and he quickly opened the gate and stepped out.

Once beyond the bars, the fellow pushed on without pausing till he came to the Elm and Franklin street corner; and there he paused and looked back.

Thad had just emerged far enough from the prison door to see the action, and being screened by the shadow the escaped prisoner did not see him.

Hurrying over to the Franklin and Centre streets corner, where Sliney was still standing, Thad gave the ruffian a few hasty instructions and then crossed over to the opposite side of Franklin street from the Tombs.

By this time the ex-prisoner had moved on at a brisk pace, and was half a block in advance of the detective, but the latter had no trouble to recover sufficient distance to be within easy view of him.

The ex-prisoner pushed on toward Broadway, and after a brief walk arrived at the thoroughfare.

Here he paused a moment and looked up and down the street, as though unsettled as to which way he should go.

Finally, however, he appeared to make up his mind, and started up-town.

Thad continued to follow.

After going a block up Broadway, the prisoner switched off onto a cross street, and started east again. He now appeared to have a definite purpose in view, for he walked briskly and without either pausing or glancing about.

He kept up this pace till he reached Third avenue, and turned up that street.

Up Third avenue he went more rapidly than ever for several blocks.

"Can it be that he is going to Sliney's?" mused Thad.

This seemed strange, inasmuch as Sliney had disclaimed any acquaintance with him.

On he went, however, and when he came to Eighth street, sure enough he turned East again.

On, on he went, and they were approaching Avenue A.

Thad looked ahead to see if Sliney had carried out his instructions, and saw that he had.

The ruffian was waiting on the corner.

The prisoner would have to pass him.

What would be the result?

If they were in reality, as Thad supposed they were, pals, they would hardly pass without speaking.

Thad watched the result of their meeting with anxiety.

The prisoner crossed the street and walked up to within a few feet of Sliney.

The two men eyed each other with unconcealed disfavor, and the prisoner passed on without pausing.

By the time he was a hundred feet beyond Sliney, the detective came up with the latter.

"Why didn't you stop him and engage him in conversation?" demanded Thad.

"He wouldn't tumble to me tip, see?" replied the ruffian. "Dat cove's stuck on hisself, an' don't take no stock into my kind."

"Perhaps he didn't know you."

"Maybe. But he looked at me hard enough to freeze me teeth."

"He appears to know some of your family or somebody else in your house, however. Look!" exclaimed the detective, pointing to the ex-prisoner, who was at that moment entering the door of the tenement.

"Wal, I'll be cussed!" ejaculated the ruffian. "I wonder who de blazes he's goin' ter see in de ranch? If he tries ter pass hisself off fer me on de ole woman an' she tumbles to his game, his name is mud, see? Dat ole woman ain't purty, but she kin lick any-ting of her inches in de ward. Yer might not believe it, but it's so. W'y, she used ter take de ole man and chuck him out o' de house any day in de week, an' he was no kid, I'm tellin' ye. He could—"

"Never mind what the old man could do," interrupted Thad. "What I want you to do is to follow that fellow into the tenement, and find out something about him. Discover, if possible, whether he belongs there or not, and who he is. Understand?"

"Yep."

Sliney thereupon left the detective, and a moment later entered the tenement.

Thad awaited him on the corner.

The fellow was gone for about ten minutes, and then returned with a troubled and perplexed countenance.

"Well?" said Thad.

"De bloke must'er fell t'ough a knot-hole," uttered Sliney.

"Why?"

"I can't see nor hear nuthin' of 'im in de crib nowhere."

"Didn't he go up into your apartments?"

"Nope. He don't seem ter 'a' went nowhere. I met Shorty Becket on de stairs, an' he hadn't saw nuthin' of 'im, an' Shorty'd bin standin' dere layin' fer his kid w'at went to de co'ner wid de can, fer ten minits, see?"

"It is strange," commented Thad.

And then a suspicion crossed his mind.

"Look here, Sliney," he said suddenly, turning upon the ruffian. "You are playing some game on me, aren't you?"

"S'elp me God, I ain't, sir!" protested the fellow.

"And if you are, it will be a bad job for you, mind what I say!"

"I ain't playin' no game, sir. I mean it."

"I will soon see whether you are or not. Stay here while I go in."

Sliney did as he was bidden, and the detective started toward the entrance to the tenement-house.

He reached the hall door, and was about to enter, when a man came hurriedly out and rushed past him.

Thad was about to pass on in, when it occurred to him that there was something familiar about the man's walk, and this caused him to turn and look after the retreating figure.

No sooner did he do so than he was convinced that it was the escaped prisoner.

But what a change had taken place in him! Instead of the rough, dirty and almost ragged suit of clothes he had formerly worn, he was now dressed in a suit of gray clothing, surmounted by a drab overcoat, and wore a fashionable derby hat; and in lieu of the close-cropped, brick-red hair, he had rather long, curly, blonde hair. And even his face had undergone a radical change. Instead of the bristling, ginger-colored beard that covered his face to the very eyes, he now had only a gracefully curling mustache of a light amber hue.

That it was possible for a man to make such a complete change in himself Thad did not question for an instant; the only thing that puzzled him was how any one could accomplish the feat in so short a time.

In the mean time Thad lost no time in considering the matter, but put after the fugitive at once, doing his thinking as he went along, and leaving Sliney on the corner to wonder what had become of him.

Whether the ex-prisoner suspected that he was being followed or not, he appeared to have no concern in the matter, for he kept straight on without looking either to the right or the left; never pausing or looking behind him.

He kept along Avenue A for a short distance only, and then turning west went as far as Third avenue.

Along this street he continued for a block or two, and then all of a sudden, and to Thad's surprise, he jumped upon a passing car.

A moment later he would have been out of sight, had it not been for the detective's presence of mind, and another street car less than half a block behind the first one.

Thad sprung upon the second car, and remained upon the platform so that he could watch the foremost car. At Twentieth street the fugitive got off and started east. Thad also alighted and followed him.

The ex-prisoner went as far as the house where Julio Lavardo had lived, and ascending the stoop, rung the bell.

He received no response, and rung again.

Being no more successful than before, he rung again, and again; and still with the same result.

Finally he appeared to despair of getting an answer, and descending the steps again, walked briskly in the direction of Broadway.

At Fourth avenue, however, he called a hack, and entering it drove up-town.

Thad instantly secured a cab and followed.

At Sixty-fifth street the hack turned toward Lexington avenue, and Thad's driver followed suit.

Scarcely had the detective's conveyance turned into Lexington avenue when he saw that hack had stopped, and as he approached, the the detective was astonished to see the ex-prisoner alight and enter the house in front of which the hack had stopped.

It was the Chester mansion!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PERSISTENT MARTYR.

THAD was in a quandary.

He wanted to follow the fugitive into the house and ascertain for certain what he believed to be the case, and that was that the man was none other than Chester himself.

But it would hardly do to enter the house in his present costume and make-up, for, in the first place, he would find some difficulty in getting past the footman at the door, and in the second place, the ex-prisoner would recognize him at a glance, and probably make his escape.

On the other hand, if Thad took time to return to his lodgings and change his disguise, the fellow would more than likely be gone when he got back. For, knowing that he was being shadowed, the fugitive would not be likely to remain long at the house.

But after mature deliberation, the detective concluded that the latter course was the only one he could, under the circumstances, take.

Therefore he gave the word to the driver to take him to his place on Thirteenth street.

As he approached his place, Thad glanced up at the window and saw that there was a light.

"Poor child," he reflected. "She is doubtless sitting up waiting for me. She must have put in a very lonesome day of it."

With that he alighted and ran up-stairs.

A moment later, when he opened the door and entered his apartments, he met a sight that astonished him.

The sitting-room was ablaze with light, and Juliette stood in the middle of the floor, staring with wild eyes and face blanched with terror toward the back room.

So startling was the figure of the terrified child, that Thad was rooted to the spot for a moment. But soon recovering his coolness, he approached the child and touching her on the arm said, in a gentle voice:

"What is it, my child?"

"There!" she whispered, pointing in the direction in which she was gazing. "Look!"

Thad could see nothing from where he stood, but without asking for further explanation, he hurried into the back room.

There he met a sight that caused his blood to run cold, and he did not wonder that the child had been terrified.

In the door opening into the elevator, and with his chin just above the ledge, was the hideous face of Namby Veque.

Hideous at all times, he was tenfold more so now, for his bleary eyes were rolled up, his tongue protruding, and his face a ghastly purple.

Upon examination Thad found that the dwarf was hanging by his head, his body being below the floor of the elevator and his head between the elevator and the wall.

He had evidently fallen in that position.

It was with considerable difficulty that Thad pulled the elevator up and extricated the little fellow, whom he found extremely heavy for his appearance, but he finally succeeded in doing so, and carried the dwarf into the sitting-room and laid him upon the lounge.

The dwarf was limp and to all appearances lifeless, but when Thad examined him he found that there was a faint flutter of the heart.

The detective was not at a loss what to do under the circumstances.

First prying open the little fellow's mouth and pouring a few drops of brandy down his throat, he set to work rubbing his hands, his arms and his chest.

In the course of ten minutes the dwarf began to show symptoms of returning consciousness, and then Thad telephoned for a doctor of his acquaintance.

When this was done, he turned to Juliette, who had been a silent and horrified spectator of all that had passed, and asked:

"How did it happen, my dear?"

"All I know, sir, is that he came up the elevator and made such a noise that I opened the door to see what it was, and then he jumped out and tried to take me away. But I screamed and ran into the front room. He ran after me, and just as we reached the middle of the floor some one rung the bell. He must have thought it was you, for he looked awfully frightened and ran back and jumped upon the elevator. I don't know how it was, but the moment he jumped on, the elevator started and he fell off and his head caught between it and the wall."

"Served him right," remarked the detective, "but I hope he won't die till we get a confession out of him, for I believe the rascal knows something that we ought to know. Stay here and receive the doctor, Juliette," continued Thad, "and I will go back and change my clothes."

"All right, sir."

Thad then retired to his dressing-room, where he removed his disguise and became his natural self again. Then putting on a neat suit of clothes he returned to the sitting-room.

The doctor had arrived and was examining the injured man.

He looked up as Thad entered, and bowed.

"What are the prospects, doctor?" inquired the detective.

The doctor shook his head dubiously.

"Not much for life, Thad," he replied; "but a good deal for death. How did it happen?"

Thad explained the circumstances, and then continued:

"Will you remain with the patient, doctor? I have an appointment that cannot be deferred."

"Yes," replied the physician.

"By the way," resumed Thad, "I am anxious to know what the fellow has to say

for himself if he recovers far enough to talk, and I guess I had better get a stenographer to take it down."

"So far as that is concerned, Thad," remarked the doctor, "I am a pretty good stenographer myself, and if you can trust me, I will take pleasure in taking down whatever he has to say."

"Good! That will do capitally. I will go now. The little girl here will attend to any errand you wish done about the place. Good-by, Juliette!"

"Good by, sir."

And a little later the detective was in a cab driving at a lively pace toward the Chester mansion.

To his surprise he found the house in darkness. But when he came to consult his watch, he did not wonder at it, for it was after midnight.

However, as he had a warrant for the arrest of Chester, that was sufficient excuse for demanding an entrance, and he rung the bell.

After a trifling delay the footman opened the door, and Thad asked for Mr. Chester.

"E's hengaged, sir, and can't see anybody," returned the footman.

"I guess he will see me," said Thad, throwing back the lapel of his coat and showing his badge, and at the same time pushing past the lackey into the hall. "Where is he?"

"'Old on, sir, please!" cried the footman, frantically. "'E's with the madam, and she's very hill. Step in the parlor and Hi'll see hif 'e'll see you."

"Very well," returned the detective, walking into the parlor. "I will wait here, but don't fail to tell him that my business is imperative."

"Yes, sir."

And the footman departed.

In a very short time the parlor door opened and a gentleman walked in, whom Thad had no difficulty in recognizing as the same he had seen an hour or two before coming out of the tenement on Avenue A, only he was even better dressed now than then.

Approaching the detective and extending his hand, Chester (for it was he) said:

"This, I presume, is Detective Burr, of whom I have heard so much of late. My name is Lavardo."

"Glad to know you, sir," returned Thad.

"Yes, I am, as you guessed, Detective Burr, or as most people call me, Thad Burr; and I am sorry to say that I have—"

"A warrant for my arrest," interpolated the other. "Yes, I imagined you had. Are you in a hurry, Mr. Burr?"

"Not at all."

"Because my wife is dying, I think, and—"

"I see," interposed the detective. "She will probably confess the crime of which you have been making the world believe you were guilty."

Chester, or Lavardo, colored to the roots of his hair.

"Say, rather, the crime of which I am guilty," he insisted.

"As you like, Mr. Lavardo. But, go to your wife, and I will remain here. Only promise me that if she confesses, you will do yourself the justice to tell me the truth. I pledge you my word it shall go no further."

Lavardo bent his eyes upon the floor for a full minute, and Thad could see his bosom heaving violently with conflicting emotions.

Finally he raised his head, and grasping Thad's hand warmly, said:

"So be it," and hurried away.

The moment Thad had looked into his face he was satisfied that he was an innocent man.

There was something so noble and generous about the whole bearing of the man, that any one must have been prepossessed with him at a glance.

As soon as Lavardo was gone Thad threw himself into an easy-chair, lighted a cigar and prepared to make himself comfortable.

Everything was quiet in his immediate neighborhood, and he could catch but a vague hum of distant sounds. From these he surmised that there were hurrying and bustling away off somewhere in the great building: and his imagination painted anxious faces and eager glances; of whisperings from pallid lips, and deep-drawn, agonizing sighs.

The parlor wherein he sat was lighted by wax candles, that threw a soft, mellow light just sufficient to give objects an indistinct and ghostly appearance, and the whole effect was soothing and conducive to drowsiness.

For a time Thad's mind was busy with recollections and ruminations of the past, especially the last few days, since he had gone to work upon the present case. He went over in retrospect every detail of the case, from the time he went into the murdered artist's studio up to that moment, and he could not help wondering at the strange and perplexing labyrinth into which it had carried him.

Gradually his mind ran along down the channel till it came to the strange creature up stairs whose friends were watching to see the last vital spark flicker and go out.

And this brought him to little Miss Petero and her queer story, and especially her prophecy that Mrs. Chester would soon pass the dark river.

What did she mean?

Was it mere surmise on her part, or had she a deeper—possibly a criminal—insight into the hidden causes of the lady's illness?

Gradually the detective grew drowsy, and the physical world became indistinct and filmy like a dreamland picture. The pictures on the wall assumed grotesque shapes, or took upon them life and action.

The nymph bearing the form and features of Sylvia Carbonetti became a living, breathing creature and got itself mixed up in some inexplicable way with the dwarf, the little woman and the murdered artist.

Mingled with these visions were the occasional sounds of real life as some one hurried through the hall on some errand of mercy.

Finally Thad lost all consciousness and joined the mystic phantoms of the realm of sleep.

How long he slept he knew not. The first impression he had of real existence was when he awoke and found Lavardo standing over him.

Thad could not, for an instant, realize where he was. He sprang to his feet suddenly, and then, as the gentleman's features fell upon his vision it all came back to him.

"It is ended," were Lavardo's first words. "You may take me along."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, "is she dead?"

"No; not exactly. But she has fallen into that comatose state from which she will either revive in an improved condition, or not revive at all. The doctor holds out no hope of her ever reviving."

"And did she make no confession?"

"No, she went to sleep with her secret, if such she has, locked in her breast. Take me along."

"There is no hurry, my friend," said Thad in a kindly voice. "Sit down; I wish to speak with you."

Lavardo sunk mechanically into a seat.

Thad noticed now, as he drew his chair near that of the Italian, that his face had grown haggard and worn during the night.

"What was the cause of her illness?" asked Thad.

The other was silent for a moment and appeared to be struggling against some terrible emotion. At length he appeared to gain the mastery, grew calm, and replied, in a hoarse whisper:

"Suicide."

"To what cause do you attribute her desire for self-destruction?"

"I cannot tell—trouble, I presume."

"Tell me the whole truth, my friend," pleaded the detective. "I am satisfied that you are an innocent man, suffering martyrdom for another, your wife, most likely. I appreciate your spirit of self-denial and desire to shield her, but you owe it to yourself, now that she is beyond the jurisdiction of human justice, to tell the truth and acquit yourself."

"No, no, I cannot," he answered gloomily. "That she had faults, I shall not deny, but no word of mine shall brand her as a criminal. If I suffer martyrdom as you are pleased to call it, that is my affair, not yours. So do not ask me to exonerate myself by smirching her name."

"But, my dear, sir, you will not smirch her name, because no living creature will ever hear the story but myself! Now, listen! You believe firmly that your wife was un-

faithful to you. I do not know whether she was or not. You believed that the card, begging her to leave you and go with the writer was written by Gazippe. I know it was *not*?"

"What?" exclaimed Lavardo, springing to his feet while his face became illuminated as with the light of transcendent hope. "Do you say that you *know* this?"

"I do," replied Thad firmly.

"Oh, thank you for that word of hope!" he cried in ecstasy. "I could almost wish to live now, and have her live, if it were not for the fact that—"

He paused suddenly, and became greatly agitated.

"That you *imagine* she murdered the artist. Let me tell you, my friend. The murder was committed at exactly ten minutes past twelve, noon, at which time, your wife's maid swears the lady was at her own home."

"Is that true?" he exclaimed in a transport of wild joy.

"Yes. Now, what do you think about having yourself incarcerated as the murderer?"

Before he had time to reply the door opened, and in walked Juliette.

Advancing toward Thad, she handed him a paper.

"My child!" cried Lavardo, as soon as he recognized her, and caught her to his bosom.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

WHILE Lavardo was engaged in caressing his daughter Thad, was busily employed examining the paper which Juliette had given him.

After perusing it for some time the detective suddenly exclaimed:

"Here it is! This clears up the mystery!"

"What is it?" asked Lavardo, looking up.

"The confession of the dwarf, Namby Voque."

"What does he say?" inquired the other, eagerly.

"Well, he says, for one thing, that *he* committed the murder."

Then turning to Juliette, he asked:

"Is he dead, my child?"

"Yes, sir," she responded.

Lavardo had been so overcome with the announcement, which entirely exonerated both him and his wife that he was unable to speak up to this moment.

But he finally found utterance, and asked:

"Do you say that he confesses to having committed the murder?"

"Yes," replied Thad. "But listen, I will read the confession."

Thad then read as follows:

"THE CONFESSION OF DANTE PETERO, BETTER KNOWN AS 'NAMBY VOQUE.'"

"To All Whom it May Concern:—"

"Be it known that I, Dante Petero, realizing that death will soon close my lips forever, hereby depose, acknowledge and confess as follows:

"On the 17th of October, 18—, I murdered Vincenzo Gazippe in the following manner and for the following reasons:

"I arrived in America about five years ago, and at that time possessed considerable property left me by my father.

"Being a stranger and ignorant of the laws of the land into which I came, I sought out a former friend of my father, a lawyer named Edouardo Scovello, and empowered him to transact my business for me.

"In due course of time I discovered that he, in conjunction with my sister's husband, Vincenzo Gazippe, had swindled me out of everything I possessed.

"I went to my brother-in-law and demanded my rights, but he gave me no satisfaction. He admitted that the property had been invested, and claimed that I would get it back, with the increase incident to a good investment, some day. In the mean time he offered me a home and a menial situation, which I was forced to accept, though much against my inclination.

"I went to work for the artist, and I then discovered that he was living with another wife, while my sister was still living in Italy, and believing him dead.

"This second wife was the sister of Julio Lavardo, also known as Harold Chester.

This is why I had myself called Namby Voque, so that these people would not know that I was the brother of the artist's first wife.

"Time wore on and still I heard nothing of my property.

"My life was very sad and dreary, as that of a hideously deformed person must naturally be.

Finally, however, a circumstance occurred that afforded me a little transitory pleasure.

"The artist employed as a model a beautiful girl named Sylvia Carbonetti.

"I was fascinated with her at first sight, and whether out of pity or in a spirit of ridicule, I know not, but she appeared to reciprocate my love for her; at all events, she treated me with the greatest kindness.

"This emboldened me to push my suit, and at last in an evil moment I made a proposition of marriage to her.

"She laughed at me, of course, but to mollify my wounded spirits, claimed that the artist exacted a promise from her that she would remain single for a certain number of years.

This embittered me toward my brother-in-law more than ever.

"As a means of revenge I sent for my sister, knowing that when she arrived his second wife would leave him. My sister arrived, and the result was what I desired.

"In the mean time, I had grievances in another direction to redress.

"And here I will have to go back ten years. It was in Italy. I met and was perfectly fascinated with a beautiful young lady, who used to frequent the picture galleries of Florence. For a long time I did not even know her name. She came every day into the Di Cenci and other galleries with her mother, and finding that I had a pretty good knowledge of the art treasures, she used to hunt me up and ask me to accompany them through the galleries and describe the pictures and give their histories. This was a labor of love for me, for, as I said, I was charmed with her at sight.

"I finally learned that her name was Lucretia, and not knowing any other name I called her by that. She must have known that I was in love with her, and I imagined she encouraged me. One day her mother was not with her, and after we were tired of looking at pictures, we walked into the beautiful park of the Cascina. For a long time we wandered through the lovely place, rich with the fragrance of flowers and the songs of birds, and finally sat down to rest upon a bank of moss near a silvery cascade. The influence was too much for me. I declared my love for her in the most passionate language I could command. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and I thought this an indication that she was overcome with passion. I was mistaken. She was only laughing. Yes, she laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, while I was on my knees confessing my adoration for her.

"Suddenly something happened. I became aware of the presence of a man. A tall, light, handsome man with a golden mustache. He took me by the collar and lifted me to my feet, and asked me what I meant by making love to his wife. How I got away from the spot I do not know. I have a vague recollection of feeling the weight of his cane on my poor back, of hearing him swearing fearfully, and his deep voice mingled with the laughter of a woman. That is all I recollect. But I thirsted for revenge from that day.

"About a year ago I learned that the lady, Lucretia, and her husband lived in this city, and I began my work of revenge. My first move was to write a series of anonymous letters to Lavardo's wife, purporting to be in answer to letters of her own to various gentlemen. This had no effect until my sister secured a position in their household. Then she aided me by placing some of the communications where Lavardo could get hold of them.

"This had the desired effect. Lavardo was filled with jealousy, but instead of avenging himself upon his wife or putting her from him, as any other man would have done, he did all he could to cover up her supposed shame, even to the extent of changing his name to Chester, and living a double life. I had my revenge though, for he was ashamed of his wife, and even took his

daughter away from her and put her with his sister.

"To one of these letters I signed Gazippe's name, and this called forth a letter from 'Chester,' and a good deal of trouble subsequently, but they finally got matters explained and became quite friendly. Mrs. Lavardo had a high regard for the artist, and after her husband began to neglect her, she and the artist were together a great deal. I do not believe that anything wrong came out of it; but it gave me a new opportunity for revenge. Their own actions gave a color of truth to my fabrications.

"Finally the climax came. My brother-in-law confessed that my property was all gone, and I, having no other means of redress, determined to kill him. I thought of many plans, and at last settled upon the one I finally adopted.

"I would not only avenge myself upon him, but I would drag others in as the murderers. And this is how I worked it. My sister possessed a pair of peculiarly shaped and valuable diamond ear-rings, which had been given her years before by Lavardo.

"One day she accidentally fell, and one of the ear-rings caught in something and was torn from her ear. This was before she had gone to Lavardo's to live. I came in a moment after it happened, and persuaded her to allow me to bind and gag her, and for her to give it out that the ear-ring had been torn from her ear by a tall light man, knowing that every one would think it was Lavardo.

"My sister went to live with them, and at my request gave the solitary ear-ring to Mrs. Lavardo with the request that she would wear it. This the lady did to humor the whim.

"In the mean time I kept the other diamond. At last the time came for carrying out my scheme of revenge. I wrote a card to Mrs. Lavardo, signing no name to it, but couched in such language that her husband would think it came from the artist. I gave it to my sister to deliver, and she gave it to Lavardo himself. He glanced over it, and then tore it into fragments and tossed them into the waste-basket. My sister, as soon as he was gone, gathered up the fragments and brought them to me.

"Here, I thought, was an opportunity of getting even with Miss Carbonetti for scorning my proposal. So, five minutes before I shot the artist, I dropped the pieces of card into the water-pitcher, knowing that the detectives would find them, and thinking that the card had been written to her, connect her with the murder.

"About noon on the 17th of October I slipped into the dressing-room connected with the studios, thinking that Miss Carbonetti had gone up-stairs; but just as I got in there, I heard the artist say, 'One minute, Miss Carbonetti, just one minute.' So I knew that the model was still in the studio. I secreted myself behind a curtain. Finally she came out into the dressing-room, and I had no difficulty in getting into the studio without her seeing me.

"That was my time. I stepped out into the studio. The artist was still at work upon his picture. I kept the picture between us. I calculated about where his head would be, raised my pistol and fired.

"The artist fell dead, and I then placed the pistol, which was his own, beside him, to make it appear at first glance that he had committed suicide. This was only to perplex the police and throw the suspicion away from myself, in case Miss Carbonetti might have peeped out and seen me. I soon discovered that she had not, and I completed my original plan by putting the diamond ear-ring on the dais where the artist's model usually stood. For some reason or other, the police failed to discover either the bits of card in the pitcher or the diamond, but the detective who is now working up the case has found both.

"The detective has also made other discoveries, which would in time have led up to my conviction, had I not met with this accident.

"And now, as I must die, I feel that my chances for salvation only lie in exonerating those who have been wrongfully accused.

"Lavardo is the greatest hero I ever saw. He fully believes in his wife's guilt, and has become a martyr to screen her from the

world. As for her, there is no nobler, purer woman in the world; but my continual persecutions have driven her to the verge of insanity. My sister says she has threatened to take her own life if her husband still insists upon posing as the murderer, and before this is read, she will probably have carried out her threat.

"There is just one more mystery to clear up, and that is with regard to the cipher letters thrown into Lavardo's cell. This was my work entirely. There was no plot for rescuing him, and he was as ignorant of what the communications meant as a babe unborn.

"My latest attempt at revenge, and the one that has cost me my life, was to carry off the little girl, Juliette. This child, although the daughter of Lavardo by his legal wife, has been taught to believe by her aunt that she (her aunt) was her mother, and that her father, who was dead, was named Arlington."

Here the document ended.

There was a note by the transcriber at the bottom stating that at this point the deponent became too weak to speak further.

When Thad raised his eyes from the paper they met those of Lavardo, which were full of tears.

He put out his hand and grasped the detective's, and said in a tremulous voice:

"This is glorious news, my friend; but my God! it has come too late!"

"No, not a bit too late."

Both men looked up at the sound of the words, and were surprised to see Miss Carbonetti standing over them.

She wore a smile, and was more beautiful than ever.

"What do you mean?" gasped Lavardo.

"That Lucretia has come out of her coma greatly improved, and the doctor says there is every reason to hope that she will recover."

"Thank God!" cried Lavardo, at the same time clasping his little daughter in his arms.

"Is that my mamma?" asked Juliette.

"Yes, darling. And she is to be spared to us."

"Oh, I'm so glad. We shall be so happy, won't we, papa?"

"Yes, pet. But, let us go see mamma."

A few moments later the afflicted lady had her child in her arms, and her husband was kneeling by her bedside.

After the first ecstasy of joy had passed, she looked up at Thad, who was standing by the bedside, and putting out her white little hand, exclaimed in a weak voice:

"This is Mr. Burr, isn't it?"

"Yes, madam," replied Thad.

"Then let me thank you for helping us to triumph over our enemies and become united in a bond of love that only death can sever."

Thad bowed his head.

THE END.

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